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KING ARTHUR
COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.
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KING ARTHUR BY SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, BART.
IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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FOR GYF

KING ARTHUR BY SIR EDWARD BURNES

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

KING ARTHUR.

BY

SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, BART.

AUTHOR OF THE NEW TIMON.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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1849.



**"When Arthur was King —
Hearken, now, a marvellous thing" —
"LAYAMON'S BRUT," by Sir F. Madden,
Vol. i. p. 413.**

BOOK VII.

ARGUMENT.

Arthur and the Lady of the Lake — They land on the Meteor Isle — Which then sinks to the Halls below — Arthur beholds the Forest springing from a single stem — He tells his errand to the Phantom, and rejects the fruits that It proffers him in lieu of the sword — He is conducted by the Phantom to the entrance of the caves, through which he must pass alone — He reaches the Coral Hall of the Three Kings — The Statue crowned with thorns — The Asps and the Vulture, and the Diamond Sword — The Choice of the Three Arches — He turns from the first and second arch, and beholds himself, in the third, a corpse — The sleeping King rises at Arthur's question — 'if his death shall be in vain?' — The Vision of times to be — Cœur de Lion and the age of Chivalry — The Tudors — Henry VII. — the restorer of the line of Arthur and the founder of civil Freedom — Henry VIII. and the Revolution of Thought — Elizabeth and the Age of Poetry — The Union of Cymrian and Saxon, under the sway of 'Crowned Liberty' — Arthur makes his choice, and attempts, but in vain, to draw the Sword from the Rock — The Statue with the thorn-wreath addresses him — Arthur called upon to sacrifice the Dove — His reply — The glimpse of Heaven — The trance which succeeds, and in which the King is borne to the sea shores.

BOOK VII.

I.

As when, in Autumn nights and Arctic skies,
An angel makes the cloud his noiseless car,
And, thro' cærulean silence, silent flies
From antique Hesper to some dawning star,
So still, so swift, along the windless tides
Her vapour-sail the Lake's mute Lady guides.

II.

Along the sheen, along the glassy sheen,
Amid the lull of lucent night they go;
Till, in the haven of an islet green,
Murmuring thro' reeds, the gentle waters flow:
Shoots the dim pinnace to the gradual strand,
And the pale Phantom, beck'ning, glides to land.

III.

Follow'd the King — yet scarcely touch'd the shore
When slowly, slowly sunk the meteor-isle,
Fathom on fathom, to the sparry floor
Of alabaster shaft and porphyr-pile,
Built as by Nereus for his own retreat,
Or the Nymph-mother of the silver feet. *

IV.

Far, thro' the chrystal lymph, the pillar'd halls
Went lengthening on in vista'd majesty;
The waters sapp'd not the enchanted walls,
Nor shut their roofless silence from the sky;
But every beam that gilds this world of ours
Broke sparkling downward into diamond showers.

V.

And the strange magic of the Place bestow'd
Its own strange life upon the startled King,
Round him, like air, the subtle waters flow'd;
As round the Naiad flows her native spring;
Domelike collapsed the azure; — moonlight clear
Fill'd the melodious silvery atmosphere —

* 'The silver-footed Thetis.'

VI.

Melodious with the chaunt of distant falls
Of sportive waves, within the waves at play,
And infant springs that bubble up the halls
Thro' sparry founts, (on which the broken ray
Weaves its slight iris) — hymning while they rise
To that smooth calm their restless life supplies,

VII.

Like secret thoughts in some still poet's soul,
That swell the deep while yearning to the stars:
But overhead a trembling shadow stole,
A gloom that leaf-like quiver'd on the spars,
And that quick shadow, ever moving, fell
From a vast Tree with root immoveable;

VIII.

In link'd arcades, and interwoven bowers
Swept the long forest from that single stem!
And, flashing through the foliage, fruits or flowers
In jewell'd clusters, glow'd with every gem
Golgonda hideth from the greed of kings;
Or Lybian gryphons guard with drowsy wings.

IX.

Here blushed the ruby, warm as Charity,*
There the mild topaz, wrath-assuaging, shone
Radiant as Mercy; — like an angel's eye,
Or a stray splendour from the Father's throne,
The sapphire chaste a heavenlier lustre gave
To that blue heaven reflected on the wave.

X.

Never from India's cave, or Oman's sea
Swart Afrite wreathed for scornful Peri's brow,
Such gems as, wasted on that Wonder-tree,
Paled Sheban treasures in each careless bough;
And every bough the gliding wavelet heaves,
Quivers to music with the quivering leaves.

XI.

Then first the Sovereign Lady of the deep
Spoke; — and the waves and whispering leaves were still,
“Ever I rise before the eyes that weep
When, born from sorrow, Wisdom wakes the will;
But few behold the shadow thro' the dark,
And few will dare the venture of the bark.”

* In heraldic mysteries, the ruby is the emblem of charity — the topaz assuages choler and frenzy — the sapphire preserves chastity, &c.

See SYLVANUS MORGAN'S *Sphere of Gentry*.

XII.

“And now amid the Cuthites’ temple halls
O’er which the waters undestroying flow,
Heark’ning the mysteries hymned from silver falls
Or from the springs that, gushing up below,
Gleam to the surface, whence to Heaven updrawn,
They form the clouds that harbinger the Dawn, —

XIII.

“Say what the treasures which my deeps enfold —
That thou wouldst bear to the terrestrial day?”
Then Arthur answered — and his quest he told,
The prophet mission which his steps obey —
“Here springs the forest from the single stem:
I seek the falchion welded from the gem!”

XIV.

“Pause,” said the Phantom, “and survey the tree!
More worth one fruit that weighs a branchlet down,
Than all which mortals in the sword can see.
Thou ask’st the falchion to defend a crown —
But seize the fruit, and to thy grasp decreed
More realms than Ormuzd lavish’d on the Mede;

XV.

“Than great Darius left his doomèd son,
From Scythian wastes to Abyssinian caves;
From Nimrod’s tomb in silenc’d Babylon
To Argive islands fretting Asian waves;
Than chang’d to sceptres the rude Lictor-rods,
And plac’d the worm call’d Cæsar with the gods!

XVI.

“Pause — take thy choice — each gem a host can buy,
Link race on race to Conquest’s rushing car;
No ghastly Genius here thou need’st defy,
The fruits unguarded, and the fiends afar —
But dark the perils that surround the Sword,
And slight its worth — ambitious if its Lord;

XVII.

“Powerless to win, though potent to defend,
Its blade will shiver in a conqueror’s clasp;
A weapon meeter for the herdsman’s end,
When ploughshares turn to falchions in his grasp,
Some churl who seeks to guard his humble hearth —
A Hero’s soul should hunger for the Earth!”

XVIII.

“Spirit or Sorceress,” — said the frowning King,
“Fame like the Sun illumes an Universe;
But life and joy both Fame and Sun should bring;
And God ordains no glory for a curse.
What need of falchions save to *guard* a land?
'T is the Churl's cause that nerves the Hero's hand.

XIX.

“Not mine the crowns the Persian lost or won,
Tiaras glittering over kneeling slaves;
Mine be the sword that freed at Marathon,
The unborn races by the Father-graves —
Or stay'd the Orient in the Spartan pass,
And carved on Time, thy name, Leonidas!”

XX.

The Sybil of the Sources of the Deep
Heard nor replied, but indistinct and wan
Went as a Dream that thro' the worlds of Sleep
Leads the charm'd soul of labour-wearied man;
And ev'n as man and dream, so, side by side,
Glideth the mortal with the gliding guide.

XXI.

Glade after glade, beneath that forest tree
They pass, — till sudden, looms amid the waves,
A dismal rock, hugely and heavily,
With crags distorted vaulting horrent caves;
A single moonbeam thro' the hollow creeps:
Glides with the beam the Lady of the deeps.

XXII.

Then Arthur felt the dove that at his breast
Lay nestling warm — stir quick and quivering,
His soothing hand the crisped plumes carest;
Slow went they on, the Lady and the King:
And, ever as they went, before their way
O'er prison'd waters lengthening stretched the ray.

XXIII.

Now the black jaws as of a hell they gain;
Pauses the Lake's pale Hecate. "Lo," she said,
"Within, the Genii thou invadest reign.
Alone thy feet the threshold floors must tread —
No aid from Powers not human canst thou win
Lonely the man must dare the Shapes within."

XXIV.

She spoke to vanish — but the single ray
Shot from the unseen moon, still palely breaketh
The awe that rests with midnight on the way;
Faithful as Hope when Wisdom's self forsaketh —
The buoyant beam the lonely man pursued —
And, feeling God, he felt not Solitude.

XXV.

No fiend obscene, no giant spectre grim,
(Born or of Runic or Arabian Song,)
Affronts the progress — thro' the gallery dim,
Into the sudden light which flames along
The waves, and dyes the stillness of their flood
To one red horror like a lake of blood.

XXVI.

And now, he enters, with that lurid tide,
Where time-long corals shape a mighty hall;
Three curtain'd arches on the dexter side,
And on the floors a ruby pedestal,
On which, with marble lips, that life-like smil'd,
Stood the fair Statue of a crowned Child:

XXVII.

It smil'd, and yet its crown was wreath'd of thorns,
And round its limbs coil'd foul the viper's brood;
Near to that Child a rough crag, deluge-torn,
Jagg'd, with sharp shadow abrupt, the luminous flood;
And a huge Vulture from the summit, there,
Watch'd, with dull hunger in its glassy stare.

XXVIII.

Below the Vulture, in the rock ensheathed,
Shone out the hilt-beam of the diamond glaive;
And all the hall one hue of crimson wreathed,
And all the galleries vista'd thro' the wave;
As flush'd the coral fathom-deep below,
Lit into glory from the ruby's glow.

XXIX.

And on three thrones there sate three giant forms,
Rigid the first, as Death; — with lightless eyes,
And brows as hush'd as deserts, when the storms
Lock the tornado in the Nubian skies; —
Dead on dead knees the large hands nerveless rest,
And dead the front droops heavy on the breast.

XXX.

The second shape, with bright and kindling eye,
And aspect haughty with triumphant life,
Like a young Titan reared its crest on high,
Crown'd as for sway and harness'd as for strife;
But o'er one half his image there was cast,
A shadow from the throne where sate the last.

XXXI.

And this, the third and last, seem'd in that sleep
Which neighbours waking in a summer's dawn,
When dreams, relaxing, scarce their captive keep:
Half o'er his face a veil transparent drawn,
Stirr'd with quick sighs unquiet and disturb'd,
Which told the impatient soul the slumber curb'd.

XXXII.

Thrill'd, but undaunted, on the Adventurer strode,
Then spoke the youthful Genius with the crown
And armour: "Hail to our august abode!
Guardless we greet the seeker of Renown.
In our least terror cravens Death behold,
But vainly frown, our direst for the bold."

XXXIII.

“And who are ye?” the wondering King replied,

“On whose large aspects reigns the awe sublime
Of fabled judges, that o’er souls preside

In Rhadamanthian Halls?” The Lords of Time,
Answered the Giant, “And our realms are three,
The WHAT HAS BEEN, WHAT IS, and WHAT SHALL BE!

XXXIV.

“But while we speak my brother’s shadow creeps

Over the life-blood that it freezes fast;

Haste, while the king that shall discrown me sleeps,

Nor lose the Present — lo, how dead the Past!

Accept the trials, Prince beloved by Heaven,

To the deep heart — (that nobler reason,) given.

XXXV.

“Thou hast rejected in the Cuthites’ halls

The fruits that flush Ambition’s dazzling tree,

The Conqueror’s lust of blood-stained coronals; —

Again thine ordeal in thy judgment be!

Nor here shall empire need the arm of crime —

But Fate achieve the lot, thou ask’st from Time.

XXXVI.

“Behold the three-fold Future at thy choice,
Choose right, and win from Fame the master spell.”
Then the concealing veils, as ceas’d the voice,
From the three arches with a clangor fell,
And clear as scenes with Thespian wonders rife
Gave to his view the Lemur-shapes of life.

XXXVII.

Lo the fair stream amidst that pleasant vale,
Wherein his youth held careless holiday;
The stream is blithe with many a silken sail,
The vale with many a proud pavilion gay,
And in the centre of the rosy ring,
Propp’d on his arm, reclines himself, the King.

XXXVIII.

All, all the same as when his golden prime
Lay in the lap of Life’s soft Arcady;
When the light love beheld no foe but Time,
When but from Pleasure heaved the prophet sigh,
And Luxury’s prayer was as ‘a Summer day,
Mid blooms and sweets to wear the hours away.’

XXXIX.

“Behold,” the Genius said, “is that thy choice
As once it was?” “Nay, I have wept since then,”
Answered the mortal with a mournful voice,
“When the dews fall, the stars arise for men!”
So turn’d he to the second arch to see
The imperial peace of tranquil majesty; —

XL.

The kingly throne, himself the dazzling king;
Bright arms, and jewelled vests, and purple stoles;
While silver winds, from many a music-string,
Rippled the wave of glittering banderolls:
From mitred priests and ermined barons, clear
Came the loud praise which monarchs love to hear!

XLI.

“Doth this content thee?” “Ay,” the Prince replied,
And towered erect, with empire on his brow;
“Ay, here at once a Monarch may decide,
Be but the substance worthy of the show!
Courts are not States — let me see MEN! — behind
Where stands the People? — Genius, lift the blind!”

XLII.

Slow fades the pageant, and the Phantom stage
As slowly fill'd with squalid, ghastly forms;
Here, over fireless hearths cowered shivering Age
And blew with feeble breath dead embers; — storms
Hung in the icy welkin; and the bare
Earth lay forlorn in Winter's charnel air.

XLIII.

And Youth all labour-bow'd, with withered look,
Knelt by a rushing stream whose waves were gold,
And sought with lean strong hands to grasp the brook,
And clutch the glitter lapsing from the hold,
Till with mad laugh it ceas'd, and, tott'ring down
Fell, and on frowning skies scowl'd back the frown.

XLIV.

No careless Childhood laughed disportingly,
But dwarf'd, pale mandrakes with a century's gloom
On infant brows, beneath a Poison-tree
With skeleton fingers plied a ghastly loom,
Mocking in cynic jests life's gravest things,
They wove gay King-robcs, muttering "What are Kings?"

XLV.

And thro' that dreary Hades to and fro,
Stalk'd all unheeded the Tartarean Guests;
Grim Discontent that loathes the Gods, and Woe
Clasping dead infants to her milkless breasts;
And madding Hate, and Force with iron heel,
And voiceless Vengeance sharp'ning secret steel.

XLVI.

And, hand in hand, a Gorgon-visag'd Pair,
Envy and Famine, halt with livid smile,
Listening the Demon-Orator Despair,
That, with a glozing and malignant guile,
Seems sent the gates of Paradise to ope,
And lures to Hell by simulating Hope.

XLVII.

"Can such things be below and God above?
Falter'd the King; — Replied the Genius — "Nay,
This is the state that Sages most approve;
This is Man civilized! — the perfect sway
Of Merchant Kings; — the ripeness of the Art
Which cheapens men — the Elysium of the Mart.

XLVIII.

“But what to thee, if Pomp hath its extremes?

Not thine the shadow — Go, enjoy the light!

Begirt by guards, shut danger from thy dreams;

That serves thy grandeur which appals thy sight;

From its own entrails if the worm supply

The silken purple — let it weave and die!”

XLIX.

“Demon — O rather,” cried the Poet-king,

“Let me all lonely on the heav’n-kist hill,

Rove with the hunter — be my drink the spring,

The root my banquet, and the night-wind shrill

Howl o’er my couch with the wild fox — than know

One pomp that mocks that Lazar-house of woe.

L.

“Thou saidst, ‘Give dues to Cæsar,’ — Lord! secure

The mightier tribute Cæsars owe to men!

Thou who hast oped God’s kingdom to the Poor,

Reveal Humanity to Kings! — again

Descend, Messiah! — and to earth make known

How Christ had reign’d if on the Cæsar’s throne!”

LI.

So, with indignant tears in manly eyes
Turned the great Archetype of Chivalry;
Lo the third arch and last! — In moonlight rise
The Cymrian rocks dark-shining from the sea,
And all those rocks, some patriot war, forgone,
Hallows with grassy mound and starlit stone.

LII.

And where the softest falls the loving light,
He sees himself, stretch'd lifeless on the sward,
And by the corpse, with sacred robes of white
Leans on his ivory harp a lonely Bard;
Yea, to the Dead the sole still Watchers given
Are the Fame-Singer and the Hosts of Heaven.

LIII.

But on the kingly front the kingly crown
Rests; — the pale right hand grasps the diamond glaive;
The brow, on which ev'n strife hath left no frown,
Calm in the halo Glory gives the Brave.
“Mortal, is *this* thy choice?” the Genius cried.
“Here Death; there Pleasure; and there Pomp! — decide!”

LIV.

“Death,” answer’d Arthur, “is nor good nor ill
 Save in the ends for which men die — and Death
 Can oft achieve what Life may not fulfil,
 And kindle earth with Valour’s dying breath;
 But oh, one answer to one terror deign,
 My land — my people! — is that death in vain?”

LV.

Mute droop’d the Genius, but the unquiet form
 Dreaming beside its brother king, arose.
 Tho’ dreaming still:* As leaps the sudden storm
 On sands Arabian, as with spasms and throes
 Bursts the Fire-mount by soft Parthenopé,
 Rose the veil’d Genius of the Things to be!

LVI.

Shook all the hollow caves; — with tortur’d groan,
 Shook to their roots in the far core of hell;
 Deep howl’d to deep — the monumental throne
 Of the dead giant rock’d; — each coral cell
 Flash’d quivering billowlike. Unshaken smil’d,
 From the calm ruby base the thorn-crown’d Child.

* The Present shows that which appears submitted to our choice;
 the Future that which positively *shall be*!

LVII.

The Genius rose; and thro' the phantom arch
Glided the Shadows of His own pale dreams;
The mortal saw the long procession march
Beside that image which his lemur seems:
An armed King — three lions on his shield* —
First by the Bard-watch'd Shadow paused and kneel'd.

LVIII.

Kneel'd, there, his train — upon each mailèd breast
A red cross stamp'd; and deep as from a sea
With all its waves — full voices murmur'd — “Rest
Ever unburied, Sire of Chivalry!
Ever by Minstrel watch'd, and Knight ador'd,
King of the halo-brow, and diamond sword!”

* Richard Cœur de Lion; — poetically speaking, the mythic Arthur was the Father of the age of adventure and knighthood — and the legends respecting him reigned with full influence, in the period which Richard Cœur de Lion, here (generally and without strict prosaic regard to chronology) represents; from the lay of the Troubadour and the song of the Saracen — to the final concentration of chivalric romance in the muse of Ariosto.

LIX.

Then, as from all the courts of all the earth,
 The reverent pilgrims, countless, clustering came;
 They whom the seas of fabled Sirens girth,
 Or Baltic freezing in the Boreal flame;
 Or they, who watch the Star of Bethlem quiver
 By Carmel's Olive mount, and Judah's river.

LX.

From violet Provence comes the Troubadour;
 Ferrara sends her clarion-sounding son;
 Comes from Iberian halls the turban'd Moor
 With cymbals chiming to the clarion;
 And, with large stride, amid the gaudier throng,
 Stalks the vast Scald of Scandinavian song.

LXI.

Pass'd he who bore the lions and the cross,
 And all that gorgeous pageant left the space
 Void as a heart that mourns the golden loss
 Of young illusions beautiful. A Race
 Sedate, supplants upon the changeful stage,
 Light's early Sires, — the Song-World's hero-age.

LXII.

Slow come the Shapes from out the dim Obscure,

A noon-like quiet circles swarming bays,

Seas gleam with sails, and wall-less towns secure,

Rise from the donjon sites of antique days;

Lo, the calm Sovereign of that sober reign!

Unarm'd, — with burghers in his pompless train.

LXIII.

And by the corpse of Arthur kneels that king,

And murmurs, "Father of the Tudor,* hail!

To thee nor bays, nor myrtle wreath I bring;

But in thy Son, the Dragon-born prevail,

And in my rule Right first deposes Wrong;

And first the Weak undaunted face the Strong."

* It is needless to say that in Henry VII. the direct line of the British kings, through their most renowned heroes, is restored to the throne of England. It is here symbolically intimated, that the date in which the Father-race of the Land thus regains the Sovereign rights, is also (whatever the mere personal faults of the Tudor kings) the date destined for the first recognition of rights more important; — the dawn of a new era for the liberties of men.

LXIV.

He pass'd — Another, with a Nero's frown
Shading the quick light of impatient eyes;
Strides on — and casts his sceptre, clattering, down,
And from the sceptre rushingly arise
Fierce sparks; along the heath they hissing run,
And the dull earth glows lurid as a sun.

LXV.

And there is heard afar the hollow crash
Of ruin; — wind-borne, on the flames are driven:
But where, round falling shrines, they coil and flash,
A seraph's hand extends a scroll from heaven,
And the rude shape cries loud, "Behold, ye blind,
I who have trampled Men, have freed the Mind!"

LXVI.

So laughing grim, pass'd the Destroyer on;
And, after two pale shadows, to the sound
Of lutes more musical than Helicon,
A manlike Woman march'd: — The graves around
Yawn'd, and the ghosts of Knighthood, more serene
In death, — arose, and smil'd upon the Queen.*

* The reader will be at no loss to recognise the effects of the Hero-age, and that spirit of Romance embodied by the legendary Arthur, upon whatever was most gallant and most poetic in the reign of Elizabeth.

'LXVII.

With her, (at either hand) two starry forms
Glide — than herself more royal — and the glow
Of their own lustre, each pale phantom warms
Into the lovely life the angels know,
And as they pass, each Fairy leaves its cell,
And GLORIANA calls on ARIEL!

LXVIII.

Yet she, unconscious as the crescent queen
Of orbs whose brightness makes her image bright,
Haught and imperious, thro' the borrowed sheen,
Claims to herself the sovereignty of light;
And is herself so stately to survey,
That orbs which lend, but seem to steal the ray.

LXIX.

Elf-land divine, and Chivalry sublime,
Seem there to hold their last high jubilee —
One glorious *Sabbat* of enchanted Time,
Ere the dull spell seals the sweet glamoury.
And all those wonder-shapes in subject ring
Kneel where the Bard still sits beside the King.

LXX.

Slow falls a mist, far booms a labouring wind,
As into night reluctant fades the Dream;
And lo, the smouldering embers left behind
From the old sceptre-flame, with blood-red beam,
Kindle afresh, and the thick smoke-reeks go
Heavily up from marching fires below.

LXXI.

Hark! thro' sulphureous cloud the jarring bray
Of trumpet-clangours — the strong shock of steel;
And fitful flashes light the fierce array
Of faces gloomy with the calm of zeal,
Or knightlier forms, on wheeling chargers borne;
Gay in despair, and meeting zeal with scorn.

LXXII.

Forth from the throng came a majestic Woe,
That wore the shape of man — “And I” — It said,
“I am thy Son; and if the Fates bestow
Blood on my soul and ashes on my head;
Time's is the guilt, tho' mine the misery —
This teach me, Father — to forgive and die!”

LXXIII.

But here stern voices drown'd the mournful word,

Crying — "Men's freedom is the heritage
Left by the Hero of the Diamond Sword,"

And others answered — "Nay, the knightly age
Leaves, as its heirloom, knighthood, and that high
Life in sublimer life call'd loyalty.*"

LXXIV.

Then, thro' the hurtling clamour came a fair

Shape like a sworded seraph — sweet and grave;
And when the war heaved distant down the air

And died, as dies a whirlwind on the wave,
By the two forms upon the starry hill,
Stood the Arch Beautiful, august and still.

* The Stuarts, like the Tudors, were descended from the Welch kings: but the latent meaning of the text is, that whatever most redeemed the faults on either side in the great Civil Wars, and animated, on the one, such souls as Digby and Falkland, on the other, such as Hampden and Vane, may be traced to those ennobling sentiments which are engendered by the early romance and poetry of a nation. It is only from the traditions of a Hero-age that true heroism enters into the struggles for even practical ends, and gives the sentiment of grandeur, whether to freedom or loyalty. The hardest man who never read a poem, nor listened to a legend, cannot say what he would have been if the poet had never coloured, and the legend never exalted, that Prose of Life to which his scope is confined. This is designed to be conveyed in words ascribed below to Milton, who himself united all the romance of the Cavalier with all the zeal of the Republican.

LXXV.

And thus It spoke — “I too will hail thee, ‘Sire,’
Type of the Hero-age! — thy sons are not
On the earth’s thrones. They who, with stately lyre,
Make kingly thoughts immortal, and the lot
Of the hard life divine with visitings
Of the far angels — are thy race of Kings.

LXXVI.

“All that ennobles strife in either cause,
And, rendering service stately, freedom wise,
Knits to the throne of God our human laws —
Doth heir earth’s humblest son with royalties
Born from the Hero of the Diamond Sword,
Watch’d by the Bard, and by the Brave adored.”

LXXVII.

Then the Bard, seated by the halo’d dead,
Lifts his sad eyes — and murmurs, “Sing of Him!”
Doubtful the stranger bows his lofty head,
When down descend his kindred Seraphim;
Borne on their wings he soars from human sight,
And Heaven regains the Habitant of Light.

LXXVIII.

Again, and once again — from many a pale
And swift succeeding, dim-distinguished, crowd,
Swells slow the pausing pageant. Mount and vale
Mingle in gentle daylight, with one cloud
On the far welkin, which the iris hues
Steal from its gloom with rays that interfuse.

LXXIX.

Mild, like all strength, sits Crowned Liberty,
Wearing the aspect of a youthful Queen:
And far outstretch'd along the unmeasured sea
Rests the vast shadow of her throne; serene
From the dumb icebergs to the fiery zone,
Rests the vast shadow of that guardian throne.

LXXX.

And round her group the Cymrian's changeless race
Blent with the Saxon, brother-like; and both
Saxon and Cymrian from that sovereign trace
Their hero line; — sweet flower of age-long growth;
The single blossom on the twofold stem; —
Arthur's white plume crests Cerdic's diadem.

LXXXI.

Yet the same harp that Taliessin strung
Delights the sons whose sires the chords delighted;
Still the old music of the mountain tongue
Tells of a race not conquered but united;
That, losing nought, wins all the Saxon won,
And shares the realm 'where never sets the sun.'

LXXXII.

Afar is heard the fall of headlong thrones,
But from that throne as calm the shadow falls;
And where Oppression threatens and Sorrow groans
Justice sits listening in her gateless halls,
And ev'n, if powerless, still intent, to cure,
Whispers to Truth, "Truths conquer that endure."

LXXXIII.

Yet still on that horizon hangs the cloud,
And the cloud chains the Cymrian's anxious eye;
"Alas," he murmured, "that one mist should shroud,
Perchance from sorrow, that benignant sky!"
But while he sigh'd the Vision vanishèd,
And left once more the lone Bard by the dead.

LXXXIV.

“Behold the close of thirteen hundred years;

Lo! Cymri's Daughter on the Saxon's throne!

Free as their air thy Cymrian mountaineers,

And in the heavens one rainbow cloud alone,

Which shall not pass, until, the cycle o'er,

The soul of Arthur comes to earth once more.

LXXXV.

“Dost thou choose Death?” the giant Dreamer said.

“Ay, for in death I seize the life of fame,

And link the eternal millions with the dead,”

Replied the King — and to the sword he came

Large-striding; — grasp'd the hilt; — the charmèd brand

Clove to the rock, and stirr'd not to his hand.

LXXXVI.

The Dreaming Genius has his throne resum'd;

Sit the Great Three with Silence for their reign,

Awful as earliest Theban kings entomb'd,

Or idols granite-hewn in Indian fane;

When lo, the dove flew forth, and circling round,

Dropp'd on the thorn-wreath which the Statue crown'd.

LXXXVII.

Rose then the Vulture with its carnage-shriek,
Up coil'd the darting Asps; the bird above;
Below the reptiles; — poison-fang and beak,
Nearer and nearer gathered round the dove;
When with strange life the marble Image stirr'd,
And sudden pause the Asps — and rests the Bird.

LXXXVIII.

“Mortal,” the Image murmured, “I am He,
Whose voice alone the enchanted sword unsheathes,
Mightier than yonder Shapes — eternally
Throned upon light, tho' crown'd with thorny wreaths;
Changeless amid the Halls of Time; — my name
In heaven is YOUTH, and on the earth is FAME.

LXXXIX.

“All altars need their sacrifice; and mine
Asks every bloom in which thy heart delighted,
Thorns are my garlands — wouldst thou serve the shrine,
Drear is the faith to which thy vows are plighted.
The Asp shall twine, — the Vulture watch the prey,
And Horror rend thee, let but Hope give way.

XC.

“Wilt thou the falchion with the thorns it brings?”

“Yea — for the thorn-wreath hath not dimm’d thy smile.”

“Lo, thy first offering to the Vulture’s wings,

And the Asp’s fangs!” — the cold lips answered, while
Nearer, and nearer the devourers came,
Where the dove resting hid the thorns of Fame.

XCI.

And all the memories of that faithful guide,

The sweet companion of unfriended ways,

When danger threatened, ever at his side,

And ever, in the grief of later days,

Soothing his heart with its mysterious love,

Till Ægle’s soul seem’d hovering in the dove, —

CXII.

All cried aloud in Arthur, and he sprang

And sudden from the slaughter snatch’d the prey;

“What!” said the Image, “can a moment’s pang

To the poor worthless favourite of a day

Appal the soul that yearns for ends sublime,

And sighs for empire o’er the worlds of Time?

XCIII.

“Wilt thou resign the guerdon of the sword?

Wilt thou forego the freedom of thy land?

Not one slight offering will thy heart accord?

The hero's prize is for the martyr's hand.”

Safe on his breast the King replaced the guide,

Raised his majestic front, and thus replied:

XCIV.

“For Fame and Cymri, what is mine I give,

Life; — and brave death prefer to ease and power;

But not for Fame or Cymri would I live

Soil'd by the stain of one dishonoured hour;

And man's great cause was ne'er triumphant made,

By man's worst meanness — Trust for gain betray'd.

XCV.

“Let then the rock the sword for ever sheathe,

All blades are charmed in the Patriot's grasp!”

He spoke, and lo! the Statue's thorny wreath

Bloomed into roses — and each baffled asp

Fell down and died of its own poison sting

Back to the crag dull-sail'd the death-bird's wing.

XCVI.

And from the Statue's smile, as when the morn
Unlocks the Eastern gates of Paradise,
Ineffable joy in light and beauty borne,
Flowed; and the azure of the distant skies
Stole thro' the crimson hues the ruby gave,
And slept, like Happiness, on Glory's wave.

XCVII.

"Go," said the Image, "thou hast won the Sword;
He who thus values Honour more than Fame
Makes Fame itself his Servant, not his lord;
And the man's heart achieves the hero's claim.
But by Ambition is Ambition tried,
None gain the guerdon who betray the guide!"

XCVIII.

Wondering the Monarch heard, and hearing, laid
On the bright hilt-gem, the obedient hand;
Swift at the touch, leapt forth the diamond blade,
And each long vista lightened with the brand;
The speaking marble bowed its reverent head,
Rose the three Kings — the Dreamer and the Dead;

XCIX.

Voices far off, as in the heart of heaven,
Hymn'd "Hail, Fame-Conqueror in the Halls of Time;"
Deep as to hell the flaming vaults were riven;
High as to angels, space on space sublime
Opened, and flash'd upon the mortal's eye
The Morning Land of Immortality.

C.

Bow'd down before the intolerable light,
Sank on his knees the King; and humbly veil'd
The Home of Seraphs from the human sight;
Then the freed Soul forsook him, as it hail'd
Thro' Flesh, its prison-house, — the spirit-choir;
And fled as flies the music from the lyre.

CI.

And all was blank, and meaningless, and void;
For the dull form, abandoned thus below,
Scarcely it felt the closing waves that buoy'd
Its limbs, light-drifting down the gentle flow —
And when the conscious life returned again,
Lo, noon lay tranquil on the ocean main.

CII.

As from a dream he woke, and looked around,
For the lost Lake and Ægle's distant grave;
But dark, behind, the silent headlands frown'd;
And bright, before him, smil'd the murmuring wave;
His right hand rested on the falchion won;
And the dove plum'd her pinions in the sun.

BOOK VIII.

ARGUMENT.

Lancelot continues to watch for Arthur till the eve of the following day, when a Damsel approaches the Lake — Lancelot's discreet behaviour thereon, and how the Knight and the Damsel converse — The Damsel tells her tale — Upon her leaving Lancelot, the fairy ring commands the Knight to desert his watch, and follow the Maiden — The story returns to Arthur, who, wandering by the sea-shore, perceives a Bark with the Raven flag of the sea kings — The Dove enjoins him to enter it — The Ship is deserted, and he waits the return of the Crew — Sleep falls upon him — The consoling Vision of *Ægle* — What befalls Arthur on waking — Meanwhile Sir Gawaine pursues his voyage to the Shrine of Freya, at which he is to be sacrificed — How the Hound came to bear him company — Sir Gawaine argues with the Viking on the inutility of roasting him — The Viking defends that measure upon philosophical and liberal principles, and silences Gawaine — The Ship arrives at its destination — Gawaine is conducted to the Shrine of Freya — The Statue of the Goddess described — Gawaine's remarks thereon, and how he is refuted and enlightened by the Chief Priest — Sir Gawaine is bound, and in reply to his natural curiosity, the Priest explains how he and the Dog are to be roasted and devoured — The sagacious proceedings of the Dog — Sir Gawaine fails in teaching the Dog the duty of Fraternization — The Priest re-enters, and Sir Gawaine, with much satisfaction, gets the best of the Argument — Concluding Stanzas to Nature.

BOOK VIII.

I.

LONE by the lake reclined young Lancelot —

Night passed, the noonday slept on wave and plain;

Lone by the lake watch'd patient Lancelot;

Like Faith assured that Love returns again.

Noon glided on to eve; when from the brake

Brush'd a light step, and paused beside the lake.

II.

How lovely to the margin of the wave

The shy-eyed Virgin came! and, all unwitting

The unseen Knight, to the frank sunbeam gave

Her sunny hair — its snooded braids unknitting;

And, fearless, as by her own well the nymph,

Sleek'd the loose tresses, mirror'd in the lymph.

III.

And, playful now, the sandal silks unbound,
Oft from the cool fresh wave with coy retreat
Shrinking, — and glancing with arch looks around,
The chrystal gleameth with her ivory feet.
Like floating swan-plumes, or the leaves that quiver
From water-lilies, under Himera's river.

IV.

Ah happy Knight, unscathed, such charms espying,
As brought but death to the profane of yore,
When Dian's maids to angry quivers flying
Pierced the bold heart presuming to adore!
Ah happy Knight, unguest in thy retreat,
Envyng the waves that kiss those starry feet!

V.

But worthy of his bliss, the loyal Knight
Pure from all felon thoughts as Knights should be,
Revering, angered at his own delight,
The lone, unconscious, guardless modesty,
Rose, yet unseen, and to the copse hard by
Stole with quick footstep, and averted eye.

VI.

But as one tremour of the summer boughs
Scares the shy fawn, so with that faintest sound
The Virgin starts, and back from rosy brows
Flings wide the showering gold; and all around
Casts the swift trouble of her looks, to see
The white plume glisten through the rustling tree.

VII.

As by some conscious instinct of the fear
He caused, the Knight turns back his reverent gaze;
And in soft accents, tuned to Lady's ear
In gentle courts, her purposed flight delays;
So nobly timid in his look and tone
As if the power to harm were all her own.

VIII.

"Lady, and liege, O fly not thus thy slave;
If he offend, unwilling the offence,
For safer not upon the unsullyng wave
Doth thy pure image rest, than Innocence
On the clear thoughts of noble men!" He said;
And low with downcast lids, replied the maid.

IX.

[Oh from those lips how strangely musical
Sounds the loath'd language of the Saxon foe!]
"Tho' on mine ear the Cymrian accents fall,
And in my speech, O Cymrian, thou wilt know
The Daughter of the Saxon; marvel not,
That less I fear thee in this lonely spot,

X.

"Than hadst thou spoken in my mother-tongue,
Or worn the aspect of my father-race."
Here to her eyes some tearful memory sprung,
And youth's glad sunshine vanished from her face;
Like the changed sky the gleams of April leave,
Or the quick coming of an Indian eve.

XI.

Moved, yet emboldened by that mild distress,
Near the fair shape the gentle Cymrian drew,
Bent o'er the hand his pity dared to press,
And sooth'd the sorrow ere the cause he knew.
Frank were those times of trustful Chevisaunce,*
And Hearts when guileless open to a glance.

* Chevisaunce. — Spenser.

XII.

So see them seated by the haunted lake,
 She on the grassy bank, her sylvan throne,
 He at her feet — and out from every brake
 The Forest-Angels* singing: — All alone
 With Nature and the Beautiful — and Youth
 Pure in each soul as, in her fountain, Truth!

XIII.

And thus her tale the Teuton maid began:
 “Daughter of Harold, Mercia’s Earl, am I.
 Small need to tell to Knighthood’s Christian son
 What creed of wrath the Saxons sanctify.
 With songs first chaunted in some thunder-field,
 Stern nurses rock’d me in my father’s shield.

XIV.

“Motherless both, — my playmate, sole and sweet,
 Years — sex, the same, was Crida’s youngest child,
 (‘Crida, the Mercian Ealder-King) our feet
 Roved the same pastures when the Mead-month** smil’d;
 By the same hearth we paled to Saga runes,
 When wolves descending howl’d to icy moons.***

* The Angels of the Grove (*i. e.*, the birds) is a periphrasis used more than once by our earlier Poets.

** The MEAD-MONTH, June.

*** *i. e.*, in the WOLF-MONTH, January.

XV.

“As side by side, two osiers o’er a stream,
When air is still, with separate foliage bend,
But let a breezelet blow, and straight they seem
With trembling branches into one to blend,
So grew our natures, — when in calm, apart,
But, in each care, commingling, heart to heart.

XVI.

“Her soul was bright and tranquil as a bird
That hangs in golden noon with silent wing,
And mine, more earthly, gay, and quickly stirr’d
Did like the gossamer float light, to cling
To each frail blossom, — weaving idle dreams
Where’er on dew-drops play’d the morning beams.

XVII.

“Thus into youth we grew, when Crida bore
Home from fierce wars a British Woman-slave,
A lofty captive, who her sorrow wore
As Queens a mantle; yet not proud, tho’ grave,
And grave as if with pity for the foe,
Too high for anger, too resigned for woe.

XVIII.

“Much moved our young hearts that majestic face,
And much we schemed to soothe the sense of thrall.
She learned to love us, — let our love replace
That she had lost, — and thank’d her God for all,
Even for chains and bondage: — awed we heard,
And found the secret in the Gospel Word.

XIX.

“Thus, Cymrian, we were Christians. First, the slave
Taught that bright soul whose shadow fell on mine;
Thus we were Christians; — but, as thro’ the cave
Flow hidden river-springs, the Faith Divine
We dared not give to day — in stealth we sung
Hymns to the Cymrian’s God, in Cymri’s tongue.

XX.

“And for our earlier names of heathen sound,
We did such names as saints have borne, receive;
One name in truth, tho’ with a varying sound;
Genevra I — and she sweet Genevieve, —
Words that escaped from other ears, unknown,
But spoke as if from Angels to our own.

XXI.

“Soon with thy creed we learned thy race to love,
Listening high tales of Arthur’s peerless fame,
But most such themes did my sweet playmate move;
To her the creed endeared the champions name,
With angel thoughts surrounded Christ’s young chief,
And gave to glory haloes from Belief.

XXII.

“Not long our teacher did survive, to guide
Our feet, delighted in the new-found ways;
Smiling on us — and on the cross — she died,
And vanish’d in her grave our infant days;
We grew to woman when we learned to grieve,
And Childhood left the eyes of Genevieve.

XXIII.

“Oft, ev’n from me, musing she stole away,
Where thick the woodland girt the ruin’d hall
Of Cymrian kings, forgotten; — thro’ the day
Still as the lonely nightingale midst all
The joyous choir that drown her murmur: — So
Mused Crida’s daughter on the Saxon’s foe.

XXIV.

“Alas! alas! (sad moons have waned since then!)

One fatal morn her forest haunt she sought
Nor thence returned; whether by lawless men
Captured, or flying, of her own free thought,
From heathen shrines abhorr'd; — all search was vain,
Ne'er to our eyes that smile brought light again.”

XXV.

Here paused the maid, and tears gush'd forth anew,
Ere faltering words rewove the tale once more;
“Rous'd from his woe, the wrathful Crida flew
To Thor's dark priests, and Woden's wizard lore.
Task'd was each rune that sways the demon hosts,
And the strong seid* compell'd revealing ghosts.

XXVI.

“And answered priest and rune, and the pale Dead,
'That in the fate of her, the Thor-descended,
The Gods of Cymri wove a mystic thread,
With Arthur's life and Cymri's glory blended,
And Dragon-Kings, ordained in clouded years,
To seize the birthright of the Saxon spears.'

* Magic.

XXVII.

“ ‘By Arthur’s death, and Carduel’s towers o’erthrown,
 Could Thor and Crida yet the web unweave,
 Protect the Saxon’s threaten’d gods; — alone
 Regain the lost one, and exulting leave
 To Hengist’s race the ocean-girt abodes,
 Till the Last Twilight* darken round the Gods.’

XXVIII.

“This heard and this believed, the direful King
 Convenes his Eorl-born and prepares his powers,
 Unfolds the omens, and the tasks they bring,
 And points the Valkyrs to the Cymrian towers.
 Dreadest in war — and wisest in the hall,
 Stands my great Sire — the Saxon’s Herman-Saul.**

* At Ragnarök, or the Twilight of the Gods, the Aser and the Giants are to destroy each other and the whole earth is to be consumed.

** Herman-Saul (or Saule) often corruptly written Irminsula, Armen-sula, &c., the name of the celebrated Teuton Idol representing an armed warrior on a column, destroyed by Charlemagne A.D. 772. According to some it means literally the column of Herman, *i. e.*, the leader — the War-God. Others, however, have supposed the name to be rather Jörmun-Saul, the great or Universal Column, and so the name is rendered in the Latin translation, “*Universalis Columna.*”

XXIX.

‘He to secure allies beyond the sea
 Departs — but first, (for well he loved his child,)
 He drew me to his breast, and tenderly
 Chiding my tears, he spoke, and speaking smil’d,
 ‘Whate’er betides thy father or thy land,
 Far from our dangers Astrild* woos thy hand.

XXX.

“ ‘Beorn, the bold son of Sweyn, the Göthland king,
 Whose ocean war-steeds on the Baltic** deeps
 Range their blue pasture — for thy love shall bring
 As morgen-gifts,*** to Cymri’s mountain keeps
 Arm’d men and thunder. Happy is the maid,
 Whose charms lure armies to her Country’s aid.’

* Astrild, the Cupid of the Northern Mythology.

** The more proper word for the Baltic, viz., the Eastern Sea, would probably convey to the English ear, a notion contrary to that which is intended, and therefore the familiar word in the text is selected, though, strictly speaking, the name of the Baltic does not appear to have been given to that ocean before the twelfth century.

*** MORGEN-GIFTS may be rendered marriage-gifts; according to Saxon usage bestowed by the bridegroom on the bride’s family or guardian.

XXXI.

“What, while I heard, the terror and the woe,
Of one who, vow'd to the meek Christian God,
Found the Earth's partner in the Heaven's worst foe!
For ne'er o'er blazing altars Slaughter trod,
Redder with blood of saints remorseless slain,
Than Beorn, the Incarnate Fenris* of the main.

XXXII.

“Yet than such nuptials more I feared the frown
Of my dread father; — motionless I stood,
Rigid in horror, mutely bending down
The eyes that dared not weep. — So Solitude
Found me, a thing made soulless by despair,
Till tears gave way, and with the tears flow'd prayer.”

XXXIII.

Again Genevra paused: and beautiful,
As Art hath imaged Faith — look'd up to heaven,
With eyes that glistening smil'd. Along the lull
Of air, waves sigh'd — the winds of stealing Even
Murmured, birds sung, the leaflet rustling stirr'd;
His own loud heart was all the list'ner heard.

* FENRIS, the Demon Wolf, Son of Asa-Lok.

XXXIV.

The maid resumed — “Scarce did my Sire return,
To loose the War-fiends on the Cymrian foe,
Than came the raven *œsca** sent by Beorn,
For the pale partner of his realms of snow;
Shuddering, recoiling, forth I stole at night,
To the wide forest with wild thoughts of flight.

XXXV.

“I reached the ruined halls wherein so oft
Lost Genevieve had mused lone hours away,
When halting wistful there, a strange and soft
Slumber fell o’er me, or, more sooth to say,
A slumber not, but rather on my soul
A life-dream clear as hermit-visions stole.

XXXVI.

“I saw an aged and majestic form,
Robed in the spotless weeds thy Druids wear,
I heard a voice deep as when coming storm
Sends its first murmur through the heaving air.
‘Return,’ — it said — ‘return, and dare the sea,
The Eye that sleeps not looks from heaven on thee.

* *OE*sca, Scandinavian Ship.

XXXVII.

“The form was gone, the Voice was hush’d, and grief
Fled from my heart; I trusted, and obey’d;
Weak still, my weakness leant on my belief;
I saw the sails unfurl, the headlands fade;
I saw my father, last upon the strand,
Veiling proud sorrow with his iron hand.

XXXVIII.

“Swift through the ocean clove the flashing prows,
And half the dreaded course was glided o’er,
When, as the wolves, which night and winter rouse
In cavernous lairs, from seas without a shore
Clouds swept the skies; and the swift hurricane
Rush’d from the North along the maddening main.

XXXIX.

“Startled from sleep upon the verge of doom,
With wild cry, shrilling thro’ the wilder blast,
Uprose the seamen, ghostlike thro’ the gloom,
Hurrying and helpless; while the sail-less mast
Now lightning-wreath’d, now indistinct and pale,
Bow’d, or, rebounding, groaned against the gale,

XL.

“And crash’d at last; — its sullen thunder drown’d

In the great storm that snapp’d it. Over all
Swept the long surges, and a gurgling sound

Told where some wretch, that strove in vain to call
For aid, where all were aidless, thro’ the spray
Emerging, gasp’d, and then was whirl’d away.

XLI.

“But I, who ever wore upon my heart

The symbol cross of Him who had walked the seas,
Bow’d o’er that sign my head; and pray’d apart:

When through the darkness, on his crawling knees,
Crept to my side the chief, and crouch’d him there,
Mild as an infant, listening to my prayer.

XLII.

“And, clinging to my robes, ‘Thee have I seen,’

Faltering he said, ‘when round thee coil’d the blue
Lightning, and rush’d the billow-swoop, serene

And scatheless smiling; surely then I knew
That, strong in charms or runes that guard and save,
Thou mock’st the whirlwind and the roaring grave!

XLIII.

“Shield us, young Vala, from the wrath of Ran,
And calm the raging Helheim of the deep.’

As from a voice within, I answered, ‘Man,
Nor rune nor charm locks into mortal sleep
The Present God; by Faith all ills are braved;
Trust in that God; adore Him, and be saved.’

XLIV.

“Then, pliant to my will, the ghastly crew
Crept round the cross, amid the howling dark —
Dark, save when swift and sharp, and griding* thro’
The cloud-mass, clove the lightning, and the bark
Flash’d like a floating hell; Low by that sign
All knelt, and voices hollow-chimed to mine.

XLV.

“Thus as we prayed, lo, opened all the Heaven,
With one long steadfast splendour — calmly o’er
The God-Cross resting: then the clouds were riven
And the rains fell; the whirlwind hush’d its roar,
And the smooth’d billows on the ocean’s breast,
As on a mother’s, sighing, sunk to rest.

* Griding. — MILTON. “The *griding* sword with discontinuous wound, &c.”

XLVI.

“So came the dawn: o’er the new Christian fold,
Glad as the Heavenly Shepherd, smil’d the sun;
Then to those grateful hearts my tale I told,
Then heathen bonds the Christian maid should shun,
And pray’d in turn their aid my soul to save
From doom more dismal than a sinless grave.

XLVII.

“They, with one shout, proclaim their law my will,
And veer the prow from northern snows afar,
Soon gentler winds the murmuring canvas fill,
Fair floats the bark where guides the western star,
From coast to coast we pass’d, and peaceful sail’d
Into lone creeks, by yon blue mountains veil’d.

XLVIII.

“Here all wide-scattered up the inward land
For stores and water, range the blithesome crew;
Lured by the smiling shores, one gentler band
I join’d awhile, then left them, to pursue
Mine own glad fancies, where the brooklet clear
Shot singing onwards to the sunlit mere.

XLIX.

“And so we chanced to meet!” She ceased, and bent
Down the fresh rose-hues of her eloquent cheek;
Ere Lancelot spoke, the startled echo sent
Loud shouts reverberate, lengthening plain to peak;
The sounds proclaim the savage followers near,
And straight the rose-hues pale, — but not from fear.

L.

Slowly Genevra rose, and her sweet eyes
Raised to the Knight's, frankly and mournfully;
“Farewell,” she said, “the winged moment flies
Who shall say whither? — if this meeting be
Our last as first, O Christian warrior, take
The Saxon's greeting for the Christian's sake.

LI.

“And if, returning to thy perill'd land,
In the hot fray thy sword confront my Sire,
Strike not — remember me!” On her fair hand
The Cymrian seals his lips; wild thoughts inspire
Words which the lips may speak not: — but what truth
Lies hid when youth reflects its soul in youth?

LII.

Reluctant turns Genevra, lingering turns,
And up the hill, oft pausing, languid wends.
As infant flame thro' humid fuel burns,
In Lancelot's heart with honour, love contends;
Longs to pursue, regain, and cry, "Where'er
Thou wanderest, lead me; Paradise is there!"

LIII.

But the lost Arthur! — at that thought, the strength
Of duty nerved the loyal sentinel:
So by the lake watch'd Lancelot; — at length
Upon the ring his looks, in drooping, fell,
And see, the hand, no more in dull repose,
Points to the path in which Genevra goes!

LIV.

Amazed, and wrathful at his own delight,
He doubts, he hopes, he moves, and still the ring
Repeats the sweet command, and bids the Knight
Pursue the Maid as if to find the King.
Yielding, at last, though half remorseful still,
The Cymrian follows up the twilight hill.

LV.

Meanwhile along the beach of the wide sea,
Wandered the dove-led Arthur, — needful food,
The Mænad's fruits from many a purple tree
Flush'd for the vintage, gave; with musing mood,
Lonely he strays till Æthra* sees again
Her starry children smiling on the main.

LVI.

Around him then, curved grey the hollow creek;
Before, a ship lay still with lagging sail;
A gilded serpent glittered from the beak,
Along the keel encoil'd with lengthening trail;
Black from a brazen flag, with outstretched wings
Grimm'd** the dread Raven of the Runic kings.

LVII.

Here paused the Wanderer, for here flew the dove
To the tall mast, and, murmuring, hovered o'er;
But on the deck, no watch, no pilot move,
Life-void the vessel as the lonely shore.
Far on the sand-beach drawn, a boat he spied,
And with strong hand he launch'd it on the tide.

* Both the Pleiades and the Hyades are said to be the daughters of Æthra, one of the Oceanides by Atlas.

** *Grimm'd*, from the verb *grimmen*, whence the adjective *grim* that we still retain.

LVIII.

Gaining the bark, still not a human eye
 Peers through the noiseless solitary shrouds;
 So, for the crew's return, all patiently
 He sate him down, and watch'd the phantom clouds
 Flit to and fro, where o'er the slopes afar
 Reign storm-girt Arcas,* and the Mother Star.

LIX.

Thus sleep stole o'er him, mercy-hallow'd sleep,
 His own lov'd Ægle, lovelier than of old,
 O lovelier far — shone from the azure deep —
 And like the angel dying saints behold,
 Bent o'er his brow, and with ambrosial kiss
 Breath'd on his soul her own pure spirit-bliss.

LX.

“Never more grieve for me,” the Vision said,
 “Behold how beautiful thy bride is now!
 Who to yon Heaven from heathen Hades led
 Me, thine Immortal? Mourner, it was thou!
 Why shouldst thou mourn? In the empyreal clime
 We know no severance, for we own no time.

* *Ursa Major* and *Ursa Minor*, near the North Pole, supposed by the Poets to be Arcas and his Mother.

LXI.

“Both in the Past and Future circumfused,

We live in each; — all life's more happy hours
Bloom back for us; — all prophet Fancy mused

Fairest in days to come, alike are ours:
With me not yet — I ever am with thee,
Thy presence flows through my eternity.

LXII.

“Think thou hast bless'd the earth, and oped the heaven

To her baptized, reborn, through thy dear love, —
In the new buds that bloom for thee, be given

The fragrance of the primal flower above!
In Heaven we are not jealous! — But in aught
That heals remembrance and revives the thought,

LXIII.

“That makes the life more beautiful, we bind

Those who survive us in a closer chain;
In all that glads we feel ourselves enshrined;
In all that loves, our love but lives again.”

Anew she kiss'd his brow, and at her smile
Night and Creation brighten'd! He, the while,

LXIV.

Stretch'd his vain arms, and clasp'd the mocking air,
 And from the rapture woke!* — All fiercely round
 Groupe savage forms, amidst the lurid glare
 Of lifted torches, red; fierce tongues resound,
 Discordant clamouring hoarse — as birds of prey
 Scared by man's footstep in some desolate bay.

LXV.

Mild thro' the throng a bright-hair'd Virgin came,
 And the roar hush'd; — while to the Virgin's breast
 Soft-cooing fled the Dove. His own great name
 Rang thro' the ranks behind; quick footsteps prest
 (As thro' arm'd lines a warrior) to the spot,
 And to the King knelt radiant Lancelot.

LXVI.

Here for a while the wild and fickle song
 Leaves the crown'd Seeker of the Silver Shield;
 Thy fates, O Gawaine, done to grievous wrong
 By the black guide perfidious, be reveal'd,
 Nearing, poor Knight, the Cannibalian shrine,
 Where Freya scents thee, and prepares to dine.

* The reader will perhaps perceive, that the above passage, containing Arthur's Vision of Ægle, is partially borrowed from the apparition of Clorinda, in Tasso. — Cant. xii.

LXVII.

Left by a bride, and outraged by a raven,
One friend still shared the injured captive's lot;
For, as the vessel left the Cymrian haven,
The faithful hound, whom he had half forgot,
Swam to the ship, clombe, up the sides, on board,
Snarl'd at the Danes, and nestled by his lord.

LXVIII.

The hirsute Captain, not displeased to see a
New *bonne bouche* added to the destined roast
His floating larder had prepared for Freya,
Welcomed the dog, as Charon might a ghost;
Allowed the beast to share his master's platter,
And daily eyed them both, — and thought them fatter!

LXIX.

Ev'n in such straights, the Knight of golden tongue
Confronts his foe with arguings just and sage,
Whether in pearls from deeps Druidic strung,
Or link'd synthetic from the Stagirite's page,
Labouring to show him how absurd the notion,
That roasting Gawaine would affect the Ocean.

LXX.

But that enlightened tho' unlearned man,
 Posed all the lore Druidical or Attic;
 "One truth," quoth he, "instructs the Sons of Ran,
 (A seaman race are always democratic)
 That truth once known, all else is worthless lumber:
 'THE GREATEST PLEASURE OF THE GREATEST NUMBER.'

LXXI.

"No pleasure like a Christian roasted slowly,
 To Odin's greatest number can be given;
 The will of freemen to the gods is holy;
 The People's voice must be the voice of Heaven.
 On selfish principles you chafe at capture,
 But what are private pangs to public rapture?"

LXXII.

"You doubt that giving you as food for Freya
 Will have much marked effect upon the seas;
 Let's grant you right: — all pleasure's in idea;
 If thousands think it, you the thousands please.
 Your private interest must not be the guide,
 When interests clash majorities decide."

LXXIII.

These doctrines, wise, and worthy of the race
From whose free notions modern freedom flows,
Bore with such force of reasoning on the case,
They left the Knight dumbfounded at the close;
Foiled in the weapons which he most had boasted,
He felt sound logic proved he should be roasted.

LXXIV.

Discreetly waiving farther conversations,
He, henceforth, silent lived his little hour;
Indulged at times such soothing meditations,
As, "Flesh is grass," — and "Life is but a flower."
For men, like swans, have strains most edifying,
They never think of till the time for dying.

LXXV.

And now at last, the fatal voyage o'er,
Sir Gawaine hears the joyous shout of "Land!"
Two Vikings lead him courteously on shore:
A crowd as courteous wait him on the strand.
Fifes, viols, trumpets braying, screaming, strumming,
Flatter his ears, and compliment his coming.

LXXVI.

Right on the shore the gracious temple stands,
Form'd like a ship, and builded but of log;
Thither at once the hospitable bands
Lead the grave Knight and unsuspicious dog,
Which, greatly pleased to walk on land once more,
Swells with unprescient bark the tuneful roar.

LXXVII.

Six Priests and one tall Priestess clothed in white,
Advance — and meet them at the porch divine;
With seven loud shrieks, they pounce upon the Knight, —
Whisked by the Priests behind the inmost shrine,
While the tall Priestess asks the congregation
To come at dawn to witness the oblation.

LXXVIII.

Tho' somewhat vex'd at this so brief delay —
Yet as the rites, in truth, required preparing,
The flock obedient took themselves away; —
Meanwhile the Knight was on the Idol staring,
Not without wonder at the tastes terrestrial
Which in that image, hail'd a shape celestial.

LXXIX.

Full thirty ells in height — the goddess stood
Bas'd on a column of the bones of men,
Daub'd was her face with clots of human blood,
Her jaws as wide, as is a tiger's den;
With giant fangs as strong and huge as those
That cranch the reeds, thro' which the sea-horse goes.

LXXX.

“Right reverend Sir,” quoth he of golden tongue,
“A most majestic gentlewoman this!
Is it the Freya* whom your scalds have sung
Goddess of love and sweet connubial bliss? —
If so — despite her very noble carriage,
Her charms are scarce what youth desires in marriage.”

LXXXI.

“Stranger,” said one who seemed the hierarch-priest —
“In that sublime, symbolical creation,
The outward image but conveys the least
Of Freya's claims on human veneration —
But, (thine own heart if Love hath ever glowed in,)
Thou'lt own that Love is quite as fierce as Odin!

* Freya is the Goddess of love, beauty, and Hymen; the Scandinavian Venus.

LXXXII.

“Hence, as the cause of full one half our quarrels,

Freya with Odin shares the rites of blood; —

In this — thou see’st a hidden depth of morals,

But by the vulgar little understood; —

We do not roast thee in an idle frolic;

But as a type mysterious and symbolic.”

LXXXIII.

The hierarch motions to the priests around,

They bind the victim to the Statue’s base,

Then, to the Knight they link the wondering hound,

Some three yards distant — looking face to face.

“One word,” said Gawaine — “ere your worships quit us,

“How is it meant that Freya is to eat us?”

LXXXIV.

“Stranger,” replied the priest — “albeit we hold

Such questions idle, and perhaps profane;

Yet much the wise will pardon to the bold —

When what they ask ’t is easy to explain —

Still typing Truth, and shaped with sacred art,

We place a furnace in the statue’s heart.

LXXXV.

“That furnace heated by mechanic laws
Which gods to priests for godlike ends permit,
We lay the victim bound across the jaws,
And let him slowly turn upon a spit;
The jaws — (when done to what we think their liking)
Close; — all is over: — The effect is striking.”

LXXXVI.

At that recital made in tone complacent
The frozen Knight stared speechless and aghast,
Stared on those jaws to which he was subjacent,
And felt the grinders cranch on their repast.
Meanwhile the Priest said — “Keep your spirits up,
And ere I go, say when you’d like to sup?”

LXXXVII.

“Sup!” faltered out the melancholy Knight,
“Sup! pious Sir — no trouble there, I pray!
Good tho’ I grant my natural appetite,
The thought of Freya’s takes it all away:
As for the dog — poor, unenlightened glutton,
Blind to the future, — let him have his mutton.”

LXXXVIII.

'T is night: behold the dog and man alone!

The man hath said his thirtieth *noster pater*,
 The dog has supped, and having picked his bone,
 (The meat was salted) feels a wish for water;
 Puts out in vain a reconnoitring paw,
 Feels the cord, smells it, and begins to gnaw.

LXXXIX.

Abash'd Philosophy, that dog survey!

Thou call'st on freemen — bah! expand thy scope!
 '*Aide-toi toi même, et Dieu t'aidera!*'

Doth thraldom bind thee? — gnaw thyself the rope. —
 Whatever Laws, and Kings, and States may be;
 Wise men in earnest, can be always free.

XC.

By a dim lamp upon the altar stone

Sir Gawaine marked the inventive work canine;
 "Cords bind us both — the dog has gnawed his own;
 O Dog skoinophagous* — a tooth for mine! —
 And both may scape that too-refining Goddess
 Who roasts to types what Nature meant for bodies."

* Id est "rope-eating" — a compound adjective borrowed from such Greek as Sir Gawaine might have learned at the then flourishing college of Caerleon. The lessons of education naturally recur to us in our troubles.

XCI.

Sir Gawaine calls the emancipated hound,
And strives to show his own illegal ties;
Explaining how free dogs, themselves unbound,
With all who would be free should fraternise —
The dog looked puzzled, licked the fettered hand,
Pricked up his ears — but would not understand.

XCII.

The unhappy Knight perceived the hope was o'er,
And did again to fate his soul resign;
When hark! a footstep, and an opening door,
And lo once more, the Hierarch of the shrine;
The dog his growl at Gawaine's whisper ceast,
And dog and Knight, both silent, watched the priest.

XCIII.

The subtle captive, saw with much content
No sacred comrades had that reverend man;
Beneath a load of sacred charcoal bent,
The Priest approach'd; when Gawaine thus began:
"It shames me much to see you thus bent double,
And feel myself the cause of so much trouble.

XCIV.

“Doth Freya’s kitchen, ventrical and holy,
Afford no meaner scullion to prepare
The festive rites? — on you depends it wholly
To heat the oven and to dress the fare?”
“To hands less pure are given the outward things,
To Hierarchs only, the interior springs,”

XCV.

Replied the Priest — “and till my task is o’er
All else intruding, wrath divine incur.”
Sir Gawaine heard and not a sentence more
Sir Gawaine said, than — “Up and seize him, Sir,”
Sprung at the word, the dog; and in a trice
Grip’d the Priest’s throat and lock’d it like a vice.

XCVI.

“Pardon, my sacred friend,” then quoth the Knight,
“You are not strangled from an idle frolic,
When bit the biter, you’ll confess the bite
Is full of sense, mordacious but symbolic;
In roasting men, O culinary brother,
Learn this grand truth — ‘one turn deserves another!’”

XCVII.

Extremely pleased, the oratoric Knight
Regained the vantage he had lost so long,
For sore, till then, had been his just despite
That Northern wit should foil his golden tongue.
Now, in debate how proud was his condition,
The opponent posed and by his own position!

XCVIII.

Therefore, with more than his habitual breeding,
Resumed benignantly the bland Gawaine,
While much the Priest, against the dog's proceeding
With stifling gasps protested, but in vain —
“Friend — (softly, dog; so — ho!) Thou must confess
Our selfish interests bid us coalesce. —

XCIX.

“Unknit these cords; and, once unloosed the knot,
I pledge my troth to call the hound away,
If thou accede — a show of hands! if not
That dog at least I fear must have his day.”
High in the air, both hands at once appear!
“Carried, *nem. con.*, — Dog, fetch him, — gently, here!”

C.

Not without much persuasion yields the hound!

Loosens the throat, to gripe the sacred vest.

“Priest,” quoth Gawaine, “remember, but a sound,

And straight the dog — let fancy sketch the rest!”

The Priest, by fancy too dismay’d already,

Fumbles the knot with fingers far from steady.

CI.

Hoarse, while he fumbles, growls the dog suspicious,

Not liking such close contact to his Lord;

(The best of friends are sometimes too officious,

And grudge all help save that themselves afford.)

His hands set free, the Knight assists the Priest,

And, *finis, funis*, stands at last releast.

CII.

True to his word — and party coalitions,

The Knight then kicks aside the dog, of course;

Salutes the foe, and states the new conditions

The facts connected with the times enforce;

All coalitions nat’rally denote,

That State-Metempsychosis — change of coat!

CIII.

“Ergo,” quoth Gawaine, — “first, the sacred cloak;

Next, when two parties, but concur *pro. temp.*

Their joint opinions only should be spoke

By that which has most cause to fear the hemp.

Wherefore, my friend, this scarf supplies the gag

To keep the cat symbolic — in the bag! —”

CIV.

So said, so done, before the Priest was able

To prove his counter interest in the case,

The Knight had bound him with the victim’s cable,

Closed up his mouth and covered up his face,

His sacred robe with hands profane had taken,

And left him that which Gawaine had forsaken.

CV.

Then boldly out into the blissful air,

Sir Gawaine stept! Sweet Halidom of Night!

With Ocean’s heart of music heaving there,

Under its starry robe! — and all the might

Of rock and shore, and islet deluge-riven,

Distinctly dark against the lustrous heaven!

CVI.

Calm lay the large rude Nature of the North,
Glad as when first the stars rejoicing sang,
And fresh as when from kindling Chaos forth
(A thought of God) the young Creation sprang;
When man in all the present Father found,
And for the Temple, paused and looked around!

CVII.

Nature, thou earliest Gospel of the Wise,
Thou never-silent Hymner unto God!
Thou Angel-Ladder lost amid the skies,
Tho' at the foot we dream upon the sod!
To thee the Priesthood of the Lyre belong —
They hear Religion and reply in Song!

CVIII.

If he hath held thy worship undefil'd
Through all the sins and sorrows of his youth,
Let the Man echo what he heard as Child
From the far hill-tops of melodious Truth,
Leaving on troubled hearts some lingering tone
Sweet with the solace thou hast given his own!

CHAP.

Calves the large, the young of the herd
 Glad as when first the young are born
 And fresh as when the young are born
 (A thought of God) the young are born
 When men are all the young are born
 And for the young are born

CHAP.

Nature, thou art the young of the herd
 Thou art the young of the herd
 The young of the herd are born
 The young of the herd are born
 The young of the herd are born
 The young of the herd are born

CHAP.

He hath held the young of the herd
 Through all the young of the herd
 Let the young of the herd are born
 From the young of the herd are born
 Leaving on the young of the herd
 Based with the young of the herd

BOOK IX.

ARGUMENT.

Invocation to the North — Winter, Labour, and Necessity, as Agents of Civilization — The Polar Seas described — The lonely Ship; its Leader and Crew — Honour due from Song to the Discoverer! — The battle with the Walruses — The crash of the floating Icebergs — The ship ice-locked — Arthur's address to the Norwegian Crew — They abandon the vessel and reach land — The Dove finds the healing herb — Returns to the ship, which is broken up for log huts — The winter deepens — The sufferings and torpor of the crew — The effect of Will upon life — Will preserves us from ills our own, not from sympathy with the ills of others — Man in his higher development has a two-fold nature — in his imagination and his feelings — Imagination is lonely, Feeling social — The strange affection between the King and the Dove — The King sets forth to explore the desert; his joy at recognizing the print of human feet — The attack of the Esquimaux — The meeting between Arthur and his friend — The crew are removed to the ice-huts of the Esquimaux — The adventures of Sir Gawaine continued — His imposture in passing himself off as a priest of Freya — He exorcises the winds which the Norwegian hags had tied up in bags — And accompanies the Whalers to the North Seas — The storm — How Gawaine and his hound are saved — He delivers the Pigmies from the Bears, and finally establishes himself in the Settlement of the Esquimaux — Philosophical controversy between Arthur and Gawaine, relative to the Raven — Arthur briefly explains how he came into the Polar Seas in search of the Shield of Thor — Lancelot and Genevra having sailed for Carduel — Gawaine informs Arthur that the Esquimaux have a legend of a Shield guarded by a Dwarf — The first appearance of the Polar Sun above the horizon.

BOOK IX.

I.

THRONE^d on the dazzling and untrodden height,
Formed of the frost-gems ages* labour forth
From the blanch'd air, — crown'd with the pomp of light
I' the midst of dark, — stern Father of the North,
Thee I invoke, as, awed, my steps profane
The dumb gates opening on thy deathlike reign!

II.

Thee, sure the Ithacan** — thee, sure, dread lord,
When in the dusky, wan, Cimmerian waste
By the last bounds of Ocean, he explored
Ghast Erebus, beheld; — and here embraced
In vain the Phantom Mother! lo, the gloom
Pierced by no sun, — the Hades of the tomb! —

* The mountains of hard and perfect ice are the gradual production perhaps of many centuries. — LESLIE'S *Polar Seas and Regions*.

** Ulysses. *Odys.* l. xi.

III.

Magnificent Horror! — How like royal Death
Broods thy great hush above the seeds of Life!
Under the snow-mass cleaves thine icy breath,
And, with the birth of fairy forests rife,
Blushes the world of white;* — the green that glads
The wave, is but the march of myriads;

IV.

There, immense, moves uncouth leviathan;
There, from the hollows of phantasmal isles,
The morse** emerging rears the face of man,
There the huge bear scents, miles on desolate miles,
The basking seal; — and ocean shallower grows,
Where, thro' its world a world, the kraken*** goes.

* The phenomenon of the red snow on the Arctic mountains is formed by innumerable vegetable bodies; and the olive green of the Greenland Sea by Medusan animalcules, the number of which Mr. Scoresby illustrates by supposing that 80,000 persons would have been employed since the creation in counting it. — See LESLIE.

** The Morse, or Walrus, supposed to be the original of the Mer-man; from the likeness its face presents at a little distance to that of a human being.

*** The Kraken is probably not wholly fabulous, but has its prototype in the enormous polypus of the Arctic Seas.

V.

Father of races who have led back Time
Into the age of Demigods; — whose art
Excels all Egypt's magic — Wizards sublime
To whom the Elements are slaves; whose chart
Belts worlds by boldest seraph yet untrod,
The embryo orbs flash'd from the smile of God, —

VI.

Imperial WINTER, hail! — All hail with thee
Man's Demiurgus, Labour, side by side
With thy stern grandeur seated kinglily,
And ever shaping out the fates that guide
The onward cycles to the farthest goal
I' the fields of light, — the loadstone of the soul!

VII.

Winter, and Labour, and Necessity,
Behold the Three that make us what we are,
The eternal pilots of a shoreless sea,
The ever-conquering armies of the Far!
By these we scheme, invent, ascend, aspire,
And, pardon'd Titans, steal from Jove the fire!

VIII.

Dumb Universe of Winter — there it lies
Dim thro' the mist, a spectral skeleton!
Far in the wan verge of the solid skies
Hangs day and night the phantom of a moon;
And slowly moving on the horizon's brink
Floats the vast ice-field with its glassy blink.*

IX.

But huge adown the liquid Infinite
Drift the sea Andes — by the patient wrath
Of the strong waves uprooted from their site
In bays forlorn — and on their winter path,
(Themselves a winter,) glide, or heavily, where
They freeze the wind, halt in the inert air.

X.

Nor bird nor beast lessens with visible
Life, the large awe of space without a sun;
Tho' in each atom life unseen doth dwell
And glad with gladness God the Living One.
He breathes — but breathless hang the airs that freeze!
He speaks — but noiseless list the silences!

* The ice-blink seen on the horizon.

XI.

A lonely ship — lone in the measureless sea,
Lone in the channel thro' the frozen steeps,
Like some bold thought launched on infinity
By early sage — comes glimmering up the deeps!
The dull wave, dirge-like, moans beneath the oar;
The dull air heaves with wings that glide before.

XII.

From earth's warm precincts, thro' the sunless gates
That guard the central Niffelheim* of Dark,
Into the heart of the vast Desolate,
Lone flies the Dove before the lonely bark.
While the crown'd seeker of the glory-spell
Looks to the angel and disdains the hell.

XIII.

Huddled on deck, one-half that hardy crew
Lie shrunk and withered in the biting sky,
With filmy stare and lips of livid hue,
And sapless limbs that stiffen as they lie;
While the dire pest-scurge of the frozen zone**
Rots thro' the vein, and gnaws the knotted bone.

* Vapour-home, or Scandinavian hell.

** Though the fearful disease known by the name of the scurvy is not peculiar to the northern latitudes; and Dr. Budd has ably disproved (in the Library of Practical Medicine) the old theory that it originated in cold and moisture: yet the disease was known in the north of Europe from the remotest ages, while no mention is made of its appearance in more genial climates before the year 1260.

XIV.

Yet still the hero-remnant, sires perchance
Of Rollo's Norman knighthood, dauntless steer
Along the deepening horror, and advance
Upon the invisible foe, loud chaunting clear
Some lusty song of Thor, the Hammer-God,
When o'er those iron seas the Thunderer trod,

XV.

And pierced the halls of Lok! Still while they sung,
The sick men lifted dim their languid eyes,
And palely smiled, and with convulsive tongue
Chimed to the choral chaunt in hollow sighs;
Living or dying, those proud hearts the same
Swell to the danger and foretaste the fame.

XVI.

On, ever on, labours the lonely bark.
Time in that world seems dead. Nor jocund sun
Nor rosy Hesperus dawns; but visible Dark
Stands round the ghastly moon. For ever on
Labours the lonely bark, thro' lock'd defiles
That crisping coil around the drifting isles.

XVII.

Honour, thrice honour unto ye, O Brave!
And ye, our England's sons, in the later day,
Whose valour to the shores of Hela gave
Names, — as the guides where suns deny the ray!
And, borne by hope and vivid strength of soul,
Left Man's last landmark — Nature's farthest goal!

XVIII.

Whom, nor the unmoulded chaos, with its birth
Of uncouth monsters, nor the fierce disease,
Nor horrible famine, nor the Stygian dearth
Of Orcus, dead'ning adamantine seas,
Scared from the Spirit's grand desire, — TO KNOW!
The Galileos of new worlds below!

XIX.

Man the Discoverer — whosoe'er thou art,
Honour to thee from all the lyres of song!
Honour to him who leads to Nature's heart
One footstep nearer! To the Muse belong
All who enact what in the song we read;
Man's noblest poem is Man's bravest deed.

XX.

On, ever on, — when veering to the West
Into a broader desert leads the Dove;
A larger ripple stirs the ocean's breast,
A hazier vapour undulates above;
Along the ice-fields move the things that live,
Large in the life the misty glammers give.

XXI.

In flocks the lazy walrus lay around
Gazing and stolid; while the dismal crane
Stalk'd curious near; — and on the hinder ground
Paused indistinct the Fenris of the main,
The insatiate bear, — to sniff the stranger blood, —
For Man till then had vanished since the flood,

XXII.

And all of Man were fearless! — On the sea
The vast leviathans came up to breathe,
With their young giants leaping forth in glee,
Or leaving whirlpools where they sank beneath.
And round and round the bark the narwal* sweeps,
With white horn glistening thro' the sluggish deeps.

* The Sea Unicorn.

XXIII.

Uprose a bold Norwegian, hunger-stung,
As near the icy marge a walrus lay,
Hurl'd his strong spear, and smote the beast, and sprung
Upon the frost-field on the wounded prey; —
Sprung and recoiled — as, writhing with the pangs,
The bulk heaved towards him with its flashing fangs.

XXIV.

Roused to fell life — around their comrade throng,
Snorting wild wrath, the shapeless, grisly swarms —
Like moving mounts slow masses trail along;
Aghast the man beholds the larva-forms —
Flies — climbs the bark — the deck is scaled — is won;
And all the monstrous march rolls lengthening on.

XXV.

“Quick to your spears!” the kingly leader cries.
Spears flash on flashing tusks; groan the strong planks
With the assault: front after front they rise
With their bright* stare; steel thins in vain their ranks,
And dyes with blood their birth-place and their grave;
Mass rolls on mass, as flows on wave a wave.

* The eye of the Walrus is singularly bright.

XXVI.

These strike and rend the reeling sides below;
Those grappling clamber up and load the decks,
With looks of wrath so human on the foe,
That half they seem the ante-Dædal wrecks
Of what were men in worlds before the Ark!
Thus rag'd the immane and monster war — when, hark,

XXVII.

Crash'd thro' the dreary air a thunder peal!
In their slow courses meet two ice-rock isles
Clanging; the wide seas far-resounding reel;
The toppling ruin rolls in the defiles;
The pent tides quicken with the headlong shock;
Broad-billowing heave the long waves from the rock;

XXVIII.

Far down the booming vales precipitous
Plunges the stricken galley, — as a steed
Smit by the shaft runs reinless, — o'er the prows
Howl the lash'd surges; Man and monster freed
By power more awful from the savage fray,
Here roaring sink — there dumbly whirl away.

XXIX.

The water runs in maelstroms; — as a reed
Spins in an eddy and then skirs along, —
Round and around emerged and vanishèd
The mighty ship amidst the mightier throng
Of the revolving hell. With abrupt spring
Bounding at last — on it shot maddening.

XXX.

Behind it, thunderous swept the glacier masses,
Shivering and splintering, hurtling each on each:
Narrower and narrower press the frowning passes: —
Jamm'd in the farthest gorge the bark may reach,
Where the grim Scylla locks the direful way,
The fierce Charybdis flings her mangled prey.

XXXI.

As if a living thing, in every part
The vessel groans — and with a dismal chime
Cracks to the cracking ice; asunder start
The brazen ribs: — and, clogg'd and freezing, climb
Thro' cleft and chink, as thro' their native caves,
The gelid armies of the hardening waves.

XXXII.

One sigh whose lofty pity did embrace
The vanish'd many, the surviving few,
The Cymrian gave — then with a cheering face
He spoke, and breath'd his soul into the crew,
“Ye whom the haught desire of Fame, whose air
Is storm, — and tales of what your fathers were,

XXXIII.

“What time their valour wrought such deeds below
As made the valiant lift them to the gods.
Impell'd with me to spare all meaner foe,
And vanquish Nature in the fiend's abodes; —
Droop not nor faint, ye who survive, to give
Themes to such song as bids your Odin live,

XXXIV.

“And to preserve from the oblivious sea
What it in vain engulfs; — for all that life,
When noble, lives for is the memory!
The wave hath pluck'd us from the monster strife,
Lo where the icebay frees us from the wave,
And yields a port in what we deemed a grave!

XXXV.

“Up and at work all hands to lash the bark
With grappling hook, and cord, and iron band
To yon firm peak, the Ararat of our ark,
Then with good heart pierce to the vapour-land;
For the crane’s scream, and the bear’s welcome roar
Tell where the wave joins solid to the shore.”

XXXVI.

Swift as he spoke, the gallant Northmen sprang
On the sharp ice, — drew from the frozen blocks
The mangled wreck; — with many a barbed fang
And twisted cable to the horrent rocks
Moor’d: and then, shouting up the solitude,
Their guiding star, the Dove’s pale wing, pursued.

XXXVII.

Well had divined the King, — as on they glide,
They see the silvery Arctic fox at play,
Sure sign of land, — and, scattering wild and wide,
Clamour the sea gulls, luring to his prey
The ravening glaucus* sudden shooting o’er
The din of wings from the grey gleaming shore.

* The *Larus Glaucus*, the great bird of prey in the Polar regions.

XXXVIII.

At length they reach the land, — if land that be
Which seems so like the frost piles of the deep,
That where commenced the soil and ceased the sea,
Shows dim as is the bound between the sleep
And waking of some wretch whose palsied brain
Dulls him to ev'n the slow return of pain.

XXXIX.

Advancing farther, burst upon the eye
Patches of green miraculously isled
In the white desert. Oh! the rapture cry
That greeted God and gladdened thro' the wild!
The very sight suffices to restore,
Green Earth — green Earth — the Mother, smiles once more!

XL.

Blithe from the turf the Dove the blessed leaves*
That heal the slow plague of the sunless dearth
Bears to each sufferer whom the curse bereaves
Ev'n of all hope, save graves in that dear earth.
Woo'd by the kindly King they taste, to know
How to each ill God plants a cure below.

* Herbs which act as the antidotes to the scurvy (the cochlearia, &c.) are found under the snows, when all other vegetation seems to cease.

XLI.

Long mused the anxious hero, if to dare
Once more the fearful sea — or from the bark
Shape rugged huts, and wait, slow-lingering there,
Till Eos issuing from the gates of Dark
Unlock the main? dread choice on either hand —
The liquid Acheron, or the Stygian land.

XLII.

At length, resolved to seize the refuge given,
Once more he leads the sturdiest of the crew
Back to the wreck — the planks, asunder riven,
And such scant stores as yet the living few
May for new woes sustain, are shoreward borne;
And hasty axes shape the homes forlorn.

XLIII.

Now, every chink closed on the deathful air,
In the dark cells the weary labourers sleep;
Deaf to the fierce roar of the hungering bear,
And the dull thunders clanging on the deep —
Till on their waking sense the discords peal,
And to the numb hand cleaves unfelt the steel.

XLIV.

What boots long told the tale of life one war
With the relentless iron Element?
More, day by day, the mounting snows debar
Ev'n search for food, — yet oft the human scent
Lures the wild beast, which, mangling while it dies,
Bursts on the prey, to fall itself the prize!

XLV.

But as the winter deepens, ev'n the beast
Shrinks from its breath, and with the loneliness
To Famine leaves the solitary feast.
Suffering halts patient in its last excess.
Closed in each fireless, lightless, foodless cave
Cowers a dumb ghost unconscious of its grave.

XLVI.

Nature hath stricken down in that waste world
All — save the Soul of Arthur! *That*, sublime,
Hung on the wings of heavenward faith unfurl'd,
O'er the far light of the predicted Time;
Believe thou hast a mission to fulfil,
And human valour grows a Godhead's will!

XLVII.

Calm to that fate above the moment given
 Shall thy strong soul divinely dreaming go,
 Unconscious as an eagle, entering heaven,
 Where its still shadow skims the rocks below.
 High beyond this, its actual world is wrought,
 And its true life is in its sphere of thought.

XLVIII.

Yet who can 'scape the infection of the heart?
 Who, tho' himself invulnerably steel'd,
 Can boast a breast indifferent to the dart
 That threatens the life his love in vain would shield?
 When some large nature, curious, we behold
 How twofold comes it from the glorious mould!

XLIX.

How lone, and yet how living in the All!
 While it *imagines* how aloof from men!
 How like the ancestral Adam ere the fall,
 In Eden bowers the painless denizen!
 But when it *feels* — the lonely heaven resign'd —
 How social moves the man among mankind!

L.

Forth from the tomblike hamlet strays the King,
Restless with ills from which himself is free;
In that dun air the only living thing,
He skirts the margin of the soundless sea;
No — not alone, the musing Wanderer strays;
For still the Dove smiles on the dismal ways.

LI.

Nor can tongue tell, nor thought conceive how far
Into that storm-beat heart, the gentle bird
Had built the halcyon's nest. How precious are
In desolate hours, the Affections! — How (unheard
Mid Noon's melodious myriads of delight)
Thrills the lone note that steals the gloom from night!

LII.

And, in return, a human love replying
To his caress, seem'd in those eyes to dwell,
That mellow murmur, like a human sighing,
Seemed from those founts that lie i' the heart to swell.
Love wants not speech; from silence speech it builds,
Kindness like light speaks in the air it gilds.

LIII.

That angel guide! His fate while leading on,
 It followed each quick movement of his soul.
 As the soft shadow from the setting sun
 Precedes the splendour passing to its goal,
 Before his path the gentle herald glides,
 Its life reflected from the life it guides.

LIV.

Was Arthur sad? how sadden'd seemed the Dove!
 Did Arthur hope? how gaily soared its wings!
 Like to that sister spirit left above,
 The half of ours, which, torn asunder, springs
 Ever thro' space, yearning to join once more
 The earthlier half, its own and Heaven's before;*

LV.

Like an embodied living Sympathy
 Which hath no voice and yet replies to all
 That wakes the lightest smile, the faintest sigh, —
 So did the instinct and the mystery thrall
 To the earth's son the daughter of the air;
 And pierce his soul — to place the sister there.

* In allusion to the Platonic fancy, that love is the yearning of the soul for the twin soul with which it was united in a former existence, and which it instinctively recognizes below. Schiller, in one of his earlier poems, has enlarged on this idea with earnest feeling and vigorous fancy.

LVI.

She was to him as to the bard his muse;
The solace of a sweet confessional;
The hopes — the fears which manly lips refuse
To speak to man, — those leaves of thought that fall
With every tremulous zephyr from the Tree
Of Life, whirl'd from us down the darksome sea; —

LVII.

Those hourly springs and winters of the heart
Weak to reveal to Reason's sober eye,
The proudest yet will to the muse impart
And grave in song the record of a sigh.
And hath the muse no symbol in the Dove? —
Both give what youth most miss'd in human love!

LVIII.

Over the world of winter strays the King,
Seeking some track of hope — some savage prey
Which, famish'd, fronts and feeds the famishing;
Or some dim outlet in the darkling way
From the dumb grave of snows which form with snows
Wastes wide as realms thro' which a spectre goes.

LIX.

Amazed he halts: — Lo, on the rimy layer
That clothes sharp peaks — the print of human feet!
An awe thrill'd thro' him, and thus spoke in prayer,
“Thee, God, in man once more then do I greet?
Hast thou vouchsafed the brother to the brother,
Links which reweave thy children to each other?”

LX.

“Be they the rudest of the clay divine,
Warmed with the breath of soul, how faint so ever,
Yea, tho' their race but threat new ills to mine,
All hail the bond thy sons cannot dissever!
Bowed to thy will, of life or death dispose,
But if not human friends, grant human foes!”

LXI.

Thus while he prayed, blithe from his bosom flew
The guiding Dove, along the frozen plain
Of a mute river, winding vale-like thro'
Rocks lost in vapour from the voiceless main.
And as the man pursues, more thickly seen,
The foot-prints tell where man before has been.

LXII.

Sudden a voice — a yell, a whistling dart!

Dim thro' the fog, behold a dwarf-like band,
(As from the inner earth, its goblins,) start;

Here threatening rush, there hoarsely gibbering stand!
Halts the firm hero; mild but undismay'd,
Grasps the charm'd hilt, but shuns to bare the blade.

LXIII.

And, with a kingly gesture eloquent,

Seems to command the peace, not shun the fray;
Daunted they back recoil, yet not relent;

As Indians round the forest lord at bay,
Beyond his reach they form the deathful ring,
And every shaft is fitted to the string.

LXIV.

When in the circle a grand shape appears,

Day's lofty child amid those dwarfs of Night,
Ev'n thro' the hides of beasts, (its garb,) it rears
The glorious aspect of a son of light.

Hush'd at that presence was the clamouring crowd;
Dropp'd every hand and every knee was bow'd.

LXV.

Forth then alone, the man approached the King;
And his own language smote the Cymrian's ear,
"What fates, unhappy one, a stranger bring
To shores," — he started, stopped, — and bounded near;
Gazed on that front august, a moment's space, —
Rush'd, — lock'd the wanderer in a long embrace;

LXVI.

Weeping and laughing in a breath, the cheek,
The lip he kiss'd — then kneeling, clasp'd the hand;
And gasping, sobbing, sought in vain to speak —
Meanwhile the King the beard-grown visage scann'd:
Amazed — he knew his Carduel's comely lord,
And the warm heart to heart as warm restor'd!

LXVII.

Speech came at length: first mindful of the lives
Claiming his care and peril'd for his sake,
Not yet the account that love demands and gives
The generous leader paused to yield and take;
Brief words his follower's wants and woes explain; —
"Light, warmth, and food. — *Sat verbum*," quoth Gawaine.

LXVIII.

Quick to his wondering and Pigmæan troops —
Quick sped the Knight; — he spoke and was obey'd;
Vanish once more the goblin-visaged groups
And soon return caparisoned for aid;
Laden with oil to warm and light the air,
Flesh from the seal, and mantles from the bear.

LXIX.

Back with impatient rapture bounds the King,
Smiling as he was wont to smile of yore;
While Gawaine, blithesome as a bird of spring,
Sends his sweet laughter ringing to the shore;
Runs thro' that maze of questions, "How and Why?"
And lost in joy stops never for reply.

LXX.

Before them rov'd wild dogs too numb to bark,
Led by one civilized, majestic hound,
Who scarcely deign'd his followers to remark,
Save, when they touched him, by a snarl profound.
Teaching that plebs, as history may my readers,
How curs are look'd on by patrician leaders.

LXXI.

Now gained the huts, silent with drowsy life,
 That scarcely feels the quick restoring skill;
 Trained with stern elements to wage the strife,
 The pigmy race are Nature's conquerors still.
 With practised hands they chafe the frozen veins,
 And gradual loose the chill heart from its chains;

LXXII.

Heap round the limbs the fur's thick warmth of fold,
 And with the cheerful oil revive the air.
 Slow wake the eyes of Famine to behold
 The smiling faces and the proffered fare;
 Rank tho' the food, 't is that which best supplies
 The powers exhausted by the withering skies.

LXXIII.

This done, they next the languid sufferers bear
 (Wrapp'd from the cold) athwart the vapoury shade,
 Regain the vale, and show the homes that there
 Art's earliest god, Necessity, hath made;
 Abodes hewn out from winter, winter-proof,
 Ice-blocks the walls, and hollow'd ice the roof! *

* The houses of the Esquimaux who received Captain Lyon were thus constructed: — the frozen snow being formed into slabs of about two feet long and half a foot thick; the benches were made with snow, strewed with twigs, and covered with skins; and the lamp suspended from the roof, fed with seal or walrus oil, was the sole substitute for the hearth, furnished light and fire for cooking.

The Esquimaux were known to the settlers and pirates of Norway by the contemptuous name of dwarfs or pigmies — (*Skrællings*.)

LXXIV.

Without, the snowy lavas, hard'ning o'er,
Hide from the beasts the buried homes of men,
But in the dome is placed the artful door
Thro' which the inmate gains or leaves the den.
Down thro' the chasm each lowers the living load,
Then from the winter seals the pent abode.

LXXV.

There ever burns, sole source of warmth and light,
The faithful lamp the whale or walrus gives,
Thus, Lord of Europe, in the heart of Night,
Unjoyous not, thy patient brother lives!
To thee desire, to him possession sent,
Thine worlds of wishes, — his that inch, Content!

LXXVI.

But Gawaine's home, more dainty than the rest,
Betray'd his tastes exotic and luxurious,
The walls of ice in furry hangings drest
Form'd an apartment elegant if curious;
Like some gigantic son of Major Ursa
Turned inside out by barbarous vice versâ.

LXXVII.

Here then he lodged his royal guest and friend,
 And, having placed a slice of seal before him,
 Quoth he, "Thou ask'st me for my tale, attend;
 Then give me thine, *Heus renovo dolorem!*"
 Therewith the usage villainous and rough,
 Schemed in cold blood by that malignant chough;

LXXVIII.

The fraudulent dinner (its dessert a wife;)
 The bridal roof with nose-assaulting glaive;
 The oak whose leaves with pinching imps were rife;
 The atrocious trap into the Viking's cave;
 The chief obdurate in his damn'd idea,
 Of proving Freedom by a roast to Freya;

LXXIX.

The graphic portrait of the Nuptial goddess;
 And diabolic if symbolic spit;
 The hierarch's heresy on types and bodies;
 And how at last he pos'd and silenc'd it;
 All facts traced clearly to that *corvus niger*,
 Were told with pathos that had touch'd a tiger.

LXXX.

So far the gentle sympathizing Nine
In dulcet strains have sung Sir Gawaine's woes;
What now remains they bid the historic line
With Dorian dryness unadorned disclose;
So counsel all the powers of fancy stretch,
Then leave the judge to finish off the wretch!

LXXXI.

Along the beach Sir Gawaine and the hound
Roved all the night, and at the dawn of day
Came unawares upon a squadron bound
To fish for whales, arrested in a bay
For want of winds, which certain Norway hags
Had squeezed from heaven and bottled up in bags.*

LXXXII.

Straight when the seamen, fretting on the shore,
Behold a wanderer clad as Freya's priest,
They rush, and round him kneeling, they implore
The runes, by which the winds may be releast:
The spurious priest a gracious answer made,
And told them Freya sent him to their aid;

* A well-known popular superstition, not perhaps quite extinct at this day, amongst the Baltic mariners.

LXXXIII.

Bade them conduct himself and hound on board,
And broil two portions of their choicest meat.
“The spell,” quoth he, “our sacred arts afford
To free the wind, is in the food we eat;
We dine, and dining exorcise the witches,
And loose the bags from their infernal stitches.

LXXXIV.

“Haste then, my children, and dispel the wind;
Haste, for the bags are awfully inflating!”
The ship is gain’d. Both priest and dog have din’d;
The crews assembled on the decks are waiting.
A heavier man arose the audacious priest
And stately stepp’d he west and stately east!

LXXXV.

Mutely invoked St. David and St. Brân
To charge a stout north-western with their blessing;
Then cleared his throat and lustily began
A howl of vowels huge from Taliessin.
Prone fell the crews before the thundering tunes,
In words like mountains roll’d the enormous runes!

LXXXVI.

The excited hound, symphonious with the song,
Yell'd as if heaven and earth were rent asunder;
The rocks Orphéan seemed to dance along;
The affrighted whales plunged waves affrighted under;
Polyphlosboian, onwards booming bore
The deaf'ning, strident, rauque, Homeric roar!

LXXXVII.

As lions lash themselves to louder ire,
By his own song the knight sublimely stung
Caught the full æstro of the poet's fire,
And grew more stunning every note he sung!
In each dread blast a patriot's soul exhales,
And Norway quakes before the storm of Wales.

LXXXVIII.

Whether, as grateful Cymri should believe,
That blatant voice heroic burst the bags,
(For sure it might the caves of Boreas cleave
Much more the stitchwork of such losel hags!)
Or heaven, on any terms, resolved on peace;
The wind sprung up before the Knight would cease.

LXXXIX.

Never again hath singer heard such praise

As Gawaine heard; for never since hath song
Found out the secret how the wind to raise! —

Around the charmer now the seamen throng,
And bribe his blest attendance on their toil,
With bales of bear skin and with tuns of oil.

XC.

Well pleased to leave the inhospitable shores,

The artful Knight yet slowly seemed to yield. —
Now thro' the ocean plunge the brazen prores;

They pass the threshold of the world congeal'd;
Surprise the snorting mammoths of the main;
And pile the decks with Pelions of the slain.

XCI.

When, in the midmost harvest of the spoil,

Pounce comes a storm unspeakably more hideous
Than that which drove upon the Lybian soil

Anchises' son, the pious and perfidious,
When whooping Notus, as the Nine assure us,
Rush'd out to play with Africus and Eurus.

XCII.

Torn each from each, or down the maelstrom whirl'd,
Or grasp'd and gulph'd by the devouring sea,
Or on the ribs of hurrying icebergs hurl'd,
The sundered vessels vanish momentarily.
Scarce thro' the blasts which swept his own, Gawaine
Heard the crew shrieking "Chaunt the runes again!"

XCIII.

Far other thoughts engaged the prescient knight,
Fast to a plank he lash'd himself and hound;
Scarce done, than, presto, shooting out of sight,
The enormous eddy spun him round and round,
Along the deck a monstrous wave had pour'd,
Caught up the plank and toss'd it overboard.

XCIV.

What of the ship became, saith history not.
What of the man — the man himself shall show.
"Like stone from sling," quoth Gawaine, "I was shot
Into a ridge of what they call a *floe*,*
There much amazed, but rescued from the waters,
Myself and hound took up our frigid quarters.

* The smaller kind of ice-field is called by the northern whale fishers, 'a floe,' — the name is probably of very ancient date.

XCV.

“Freed from the plank, drench’d, spluttering, stunn’d,
and bruised,

We peer’d about us on the sweltering deep,
And seeing nought, and being much confused,
Crept side by side and nestled into sleep.

The nearest kindred most avoid each other,
So to shun Death, we visited his brother.

XCVI.

“Awaked at last, we found the waves had stranded

A store of waifs portentous and nefarious;
Here a dead whale was at my elbow landed,

There a sick polypus, that sea-Briareus,
Stretch’d out its claws to incorporate my corpus;
While howl’d the hound half buried by a porpoise!

XCVII.

“Nimbly I rose, disporpoising my friend; —

Around me scattered lay more piteous wrecks,
With every wave the accursed Tritons send

Some sad memento of submergent decks,
Prows, rudders, casks, ropes, blubber, hides, and hooks,
Sailors, salt beef, tubs, cabin boys, and cooks.

XCVIII.

“Graves on the dead, with pious care bestowed,
 (Graves in the ice hewn out with mickle pain
By axe and bill, which with the waifs had flowed
 To that strange shore) I next collect the gain;
Placed in a hollow cleft — and covered o’er; —
Then knight and hound proceeded to explore.

XCIX.

“Far had we wandered, for the storm had joined
 To a great isle of ice, our friend the *floe*,
When as the day (three hours its length!) declined,
 Out bray’d a roar; I stared around, and lo
A flight of dwarfs about the size of sea-moths,
Chased by two bears that might have eat behemoths!

C.

“Armed with the axe the Tritons had ejected,
 I rush’d to succour the Pigmæan nation,
In strife our valour, I have oft suspected,
 Proportions safety to intoxication,
As drunken men securely walk on walls
From which the wretch who keeps his senses falls;

CI.

"The blood mounts up, suffuses sight and brain;
 The Hercules vein herculeanates the form;
 The rill when swollen swallows up a plain,
 The breeze runs mad before it blows a storm,
 To do great deeds, first lose your wits, — then do them!
 In fine — I burst upon the bears, and slew them!

CII.

"The dwarfs, delivered, kneel, and pull their noses;*
 In tugs which mean to say 'the Pigmy Nation
 A vote of thanks' respectfully proposes
 From all the noses of the corporation!
 Your Highness knows '*Magister Artis Vender:*'
 On signs for breakfast my replies concenter!

CIII.

"Quick they conceive, and quick obey; the beasts
 Are skinn'd, and drawn, and quartered in a trice,
 But Vulcan leaves Diana to the feasts,
 And not a wood-nymph consecrates the ice —
 Bear is but so-so, when 't is cook'd the best,
 But bear just skinn'd and perfectly undrest!

* A salutation still in vogue among certain tribes of the Esquimaux.

CIV.

“Then I bethink me of the planks and casks
Stowed in the cleft — for fuel *quantum suff*:
I draw the dwarfs — sore chattering, from their tasks,
Choose out the morsels least obdurely tough;
With these I load the Pigmies — bid them follow —
Regain the haven, and review the hollow.

CV.

“But when those minnow-men beheld the whale
It really was a spectacle affecting!
They shout, they sob, they leap — embrace the tail,
Peep in the jaws; then, round me re-collecting,
Draw forth those noselings from their hiding places,
Which serve as public speakers to their faces!

CVI.

“While I revolve what this salute may mean,
They rush once more upon the poor balæna,
Clutch — rend — gnaw — bolt the blubber; but the lean
Reject as drying to the duodena!
This done, — my broil they aid me to obtain,
And, while I eat — the noses go again!

CVII.

“My tale is closed — the grateful pigmies lead
Myself and hound across the ice defiles;
Regain their people and recite my deed,
Describe the monsters and display the spoils;
With royal rank my feats the dwarfs repay,
And build the palace which you now survey!

CVIII.

“The vanquish’d bears are trophied on the wall;
The oil you scent once floated in the whale;
I had a vision to illumine the hall
With lights less fragrant, — human hopes are frail!
With cares ingenious from the bruins’ fat,
I made some candles, — which the ladies ate!

CIX.

“’T is now your turn to tell the tale, Sir King, —
And by the way our Comrade, Lancelot?
I hope he found a raven in the ring!
Monstrum horrendum! — Sire, I question not
That in your justice you have heard enough
When we get home — to crucify that chough!”

CX.

“Gawaine,” said Arthur, with his sunny smile,
“Methinks thy heart will soon absolve the raven,
Thy friend had perished in this icy isle
But for thy voyage to the Viking’s haven,
In every ill which gives thee such offence,
Thou see’st the raven, I the Providence!”

CXI.

The knight reluctant shook his learned head;
“So please you, Sire, you cannot find a thief
Who picks our pouch, but Providence hath led
His steps to pick it; — yet, to my belief,
There ’s not a judge who’d scruple to exhibit
That proof of Providence upon a gibbet!

CXII.

“The chough was sent by Providence: — Agreed:
We send the chough to Providence, in turn!
Yet in the hound and not the chough, indeed,
Your friendly sight should Providence discern;
For had the hound been just a whit less nimble,
Thanks to the chough, your friend had been a symbol!”

CXIII.

“Thy logic,” answered Arthur, “is unsound,
But for the chough thou never had’st been married;
But for the wife thou ne’er hadst seen the hound; —
The *Ab initio* to the chough is carried:
The hound is but the effect — the chough the cause,”
The generous Gawaine murmured his applause.

CXIV.

“*Do veniam Corvo!* Sire, the chough ’s acquitted!”
“For Lancelot next,” quoth Arthur, “be at ease,
The task fulfill’d to which he was permitted,
The ring veered home — I left him on the seas.
Ere this, be sure he hails the Cymrian shore,
And gives to Carduel one great bulwark more.”

CXV.

Then Arthur told of fair Genevra flying
From the scorn’d nuptials of the heathen fane;
Her runic bark to his emprise supplying
The steed that bore him to the Northern main;
While she with cheek that blush’d the prayer to tell,
Implored a Christian’s home in Carduel.

CXVI.

The gentle King well versed in woman's heart,
And all the vestal thoughts that tend its shrine,
On Lancelot smiled — and answered, "Maid, depart;
Though o'er our roofs the thunder clouds combine,
Yet love shall guard, whatever war betide,
The Saxon's daughter — or the Cymrian's bride."

CXVII.

A stately ship from glittering Spezia bore
To Cymrian ports the lovers from the King;
Then on, the Seeker of the Shield, once more,
With patient soul pursued the heavenly wing.
Wild tho' that crew, his heart enthralls their own; —
The great are kings wherever they are thrown.

CXVIII.

Nought of that mystery which the Spirit's priest,
True Love, draws round the aisles behind the veil,
Could Arthur bare to that light joyous breast; —
Life hath its inward as its outward tale,
Our lips reveal our deeds, — our sufferings shun;
What we have felt, how few can tell to one!

CXIX.

The triple task — the sword not sought in vain,
The shield yet hidden in the caves of Lok,
Of these spoke Arthur, — “Certes,” quoth Gawaine,
When the King ceased — “strange legends of a rock
Where a fierce Dwarf doth guard a shield of light,
Oft have I heard my pigmy friends recite;

CXX.

“Permit me now your royal limbs to wrap,
In these warm relicts of departed bears;
And while from Morpheus you decoy a nap,
My skill the grain shall gather from the tares.
The pigmy tongue my erudite pursuits
Have traced *ad unguem* to the nasal roots!”

CXXI.

Slumbers the King — slumber his ghastly crew;
How long they know not, guess not — night and dawn
Long since commingled in one livid hue;
Like that long twilight o’er the portals drawn,
Behind whose threshold spreads eternity! —
When the sleep burst, and sudden in the sky

CXXII.

Stands the great Sun! — As, on the desperate, — Hope,
As Glory o'er the dead, — as Freedom on
Men who snap chains; or likest Truths that ope
Life, in God's word, on charnels, — stands the Sun!
Ice still on earth — still vapour in the air,
But Light — the victor Lord — but Light is there!

CXXIII.

On siege-worn cities, when their war is spent,
From the far hill as, gleam on gleam, arise
The spears of some great aiding armament —
Grow the dim splendours, broadening up the skies,
Till bright and brighter, the sublime array
Flings o'er the world the banners of the Day!

CXXIV.

Behold them where they kneel! the starry King,
The dwarfs of night, the giants of the sea!
Each with the other link'd in solemn ring,
Too blest for words! — Man's sever'd Family,
All made akin once more beneath those eyes
Which on their Father smiled in Paradise!

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK X.

ARGUMENT.

The Polar Spring — The Boreal Lights — and apparition of a double sun — The Rocky Isle — The Bears — The mysterious Shadow from the Crater of the extinct Volcano — The Bears scent the steps of Man; their movements described — Arthur's approach — The Bears emerge from their coverts — The Shadow takes form and life — The Demon Dwarf described — His parley with Arthur — The King follows the Dwarf into the interior of the volcanic rock — The Antediluvian Skeletons — The Troll-Fiends and their tasks — Arthur arrives at the Cave of Lok — The Corpses of the armed Giants — The Valkyrs at their loom — The Wars that they weave — The Dwarf addresses Arthur — The King's fear — He approaches the sleeping Fiend, and the curtains close around him — Meanwhile Gawaine and the Norwegians have tracked Arthur's steps on the snow, and arrive at the Isle — Are attacked by the Bears — The noises and eruption from the Volcano — The re-appearance of Arthur — The change in him — Freedom, and its characteristics — Arthur and his band renew their way along the coast; ships are seen — How Arthur obtains a bark from the Rugen Chieftain; and how Gawaine stores it — The Dove now leads homeward — Arthur reaches England; and, sailing up a river, enters the Mercian territory — He follows the Dove through a forest to the ruins built by the earliest Cimmerians — The wisdom and civilization of the ancestral Druidical races, as compared with their idolatrous successors at the time of the Roman Conquerors, whose remains alone are left to our age — Arthur lies down to rest amidst the moonlit ruins — The Dove vanishes — The nameless horror that seizes the King.

BOOK X.

I.

SPRING on the Polar Seas! — not violet-crown'd

By dewy Hours, nor to cerulean halls

Melodious hymn'd, yet Light itself around

Her stately path, sheds starry coronals.

Sublime she comes, as when, from Dis set free,

Came, through the flash of Jove, Persephoné:

II.

She comes — that grand Aurora of the North!

By steeds of fire her glorious chariot borne,

From Boreal courts the meteors flaming forth,

Ope heav'n on heav'n, before the mighty Morn.

And round the rebel giants of the Night

On Earth's last confines bursts the storm of Light.

III.

Wonder and awe! lo, where against the Sun
 A second Sun* his lurid front uprears!
 As if the first-born lost Hyperion,
 Hurl'd down of old, from his Uranian spheres,
 Rose from the hell-rocks on his writhings pil'd,
 And glared defiance on his Titan child.

IV.

Now life, the polar life, returns once more,
 The reindeer roots his mosses from the snows;
 The whirring sea-gulls shriek along the shore;
 Thro' oozing rills the cygnet gleaming goes;
 And, where the ice some happier verdure frees,
 Laugh into light frank-eyed anemones.

V.

Out from the seas still solid, frown'd a lone
 Chaos of chasm and precipice and rock,
 There, while the meteors on their revels shone,
 Growling hoarse glee, in many a grauly** flock,
 With their huge young, the sea-bears sprawling play'd
 Near the charr'd crater, some mute Hecla made.

* The apparition of two or more suns in the polar firmament is well known. Mr. Ellis saw six — they are most brilliant at day-break — and though diminished in splendour are still visible even after the appearance of the real sun.

** *Grauly* and *grausame*, are both adjectives which belong to the Saxon element of the language, and are fairly reclaimed from the German. The Scotch indeed have preserved the first.

VI.

Sullen before that cavern's vast repose,
Like the lorn wrecks of a despairing race
Chased to their last hold by triumphant foes,
Darkness and Horror stood! But from the space
Within the cave, and o'er the ice-ground wan,
Quivers a Shadow vaguely mocking man.

VII.

Like man's the Shadow falls, yet falling loses
The shape it took, each moment changefully;
As when the wind on Runic waves confuses
The weird boughs toss'd from some prophetic tree.
Fantastic, goblin-like, and fitful thrown,
Comes the strange Shadow from the drear Unknown.

VIII.

It is *not* man's — for they, man's savage foes,
Whose sense ne'er fails them when the scent is blood,
Sport in the shadow the Unseen One throws,
Nor hush their young to sniff the human food;
But, undisturbed as if their home was there,
Pass to and fro the light-defying lair.

IX.

So the bears gamboll'd, so the Shadow play'd,

When sudden halts the uncouth merriment.

Now man — in truth, draws near, man's steps invade

The men-devourers! — Snorting to the scent,
To, where they stretch dread necks of shaggy snow,
Grin with white fangs, and greed the blood to flow!

X.

Grotesquely undulating, moves the flock,

Low grumbling as the grisly ranks divide;

Some heave their slow bulk peering up the rock,

Some stand erect, and shift from side to side
The keen quick ear, the red dilating eye,
And steam the hard air with a hungry sigh.

XI.

At length unquiet and amazed — as rings

On to their haunt direct, the dauntless stride,
With the sharp instinct of all savage things

That doubt a prey by which they are defied,
They send from each to each a troubled stare,
And huddle close, suspicious of the snare.

XII.

Then a huge leader, with concerted wile,
Creeps lumbering on, and, to his guidance slow
The shaggèd armies move, in cautious file,
Till one by one, in ambush for the foe,
Drops into chasm and cleft, — and vanishing
With stealthy murder girds the coming King!

XIII.

He comes, — the Conqueror in the Halls of Time,
Known by his silver herald in the Dove,
By his imperial tread, and front sublime
With power as tranquil as the lids of Jove, —
All shapes of death the realms around afford: —
From Fiends God guard him! — from all else his sword!

XIV.

For he, with spring the huts of ice had left
And the small People of the world of snows:
Their food the seal, their camp at night, the cleft,
His bold Norwegians follow where he goes;
Now in the rear afar, their chief they miss,
And grudge the danger which they deem a bliss.

XV.

Ere yet the meteors from the morning sky
Chased large Orion, — in the hour when sleep
Reflects its ghost-land stillest on the eye,
Had stol'n the lonely King; and o'er the deep
Sought by the clue the dwarfmen-legends yield,
And the Dove's wing — the demon-guarded Shield.

XVI.

The Desert of the Desolate is won.
Still lurks, unseen, the ambush horrible —
Nought stirs around beneath the twofold sun
Save that strange Shadow, where before it fell,
Still falling; — varying, quivering to and fro,
From the black cavern on the glaring snow.

XVII.

Slow the devourers rise, and peer around:
Now crag and cliff move dire with savage life,
And rolling downward, — all the dismal ground
Shakes with the roar and bristles with the strife:
Not unprepared — (when ever are the brave?)
Stands the firm King, and bares the diamond glaive.

XVIII.

Streams in the meteor fires the fulgent brand,
Lightening along the air, the sea, the rock,
Bright as the arrow in that heavenly hand
Which slew the Python! Blinded halt the flock,
And the great roar, but now so rough and high,
Sinks into terror wailing timidly.

XIX.

Yet the fierce instinct and the rabid sting
Of famine goad again the check'd array;
And close and closer in tumultuous ring,
Reels on the death-mass crushing towards its prey.
A dull groan tells where first the falchion sweeps —
When into shape the cave-born Shadow leaps!

XX.

Out from the dark it leapt — the awful form!
Manlike, but sure not human! on its hair
The ice-barbs bristled: like a coming storm
The breath smote lifeless every wind in air;
Dread form deform'd, as, ere the birth of Light,
Some son of Chaos and the Antique Night!

XXI.

At once a dwarf and giant — trunk and limb'
Knit in gnarl'd strength as by a monstrous chance,
Never Chimera more grotesque and grim,
Paled Ægypt's priesthood with its own romance,
When, from each dire delirium Fancy knows,
Some Typhon-type of Powers destroying rose.

XXII.

At the dread presence, ice a double cold
Conceived; the meteors from their dazzling play
Paused; and appalled into their azure hold
Shrunk back with all their banners; not a ray
Broke o'er the dead sea and the doleful shore,
Winter's steel grasp lock'd the dumb world once more.

XXIII.

Halted the war — as the wild multitude
Left the King scatheless, and their leaders slain;
And round the giant dwarf the baleful brood
Came with low howls of terror, wrath, and pain,
As children round their father. *They* depart,
But strife remains; Fear and the Human Heart;

XXIV.

For Fear was on the bold! Then spoke aloud
 The horrent Image. "Child of hateful Day,
 What madness snares thee to the glooms that shroud
 The realms abandoned to my secret sway?
 Why on mine air first breathes the human breath?
 Hath thy far world no fairer path to Death?"

XXV.

"All ways to Death, but one to Glory leads,
 That which alike thro' earth, or air, or wave,
 Bears a bold thought to goals in noble deeds,"
 Said the pale King. "And this, methinks, the cave
 Which hides the Shield that rock'd the sleep of one
 By whom ev'n Fable shows what deeds were done!

XXVI.

"I seek the talisman which guards the free,
 And tread where erst the Sire of freemen trod."*
 "Ho!" laugh'd the dwarf, "Walhalla's child was He!
Man gluts the fiend when he assumes the god." —
 "No god, Deceiver, tho' man's erring creeds
 Make gods of men when godlike are their deeds;

* THOR'S visit to the realms of Hela and Lok forms a prominent incident in the romance of Scandinavian mythology. With the Scandinavian branch of the Teuton family Thor was the favourite deity — and it was natural to that free and valiant race to identify liberty with war.

XXVII.

“And if the Only and Eternal One

Hath, ere his last illuminate Word Reveal'd,
Left some grand Memory on its airy throne,

Nor smote the nations when to names they kneel'd —
It is that each false god was some great truth! —
To races Heroes are as Bards to youth!”

XXVIII.

Thus spoke the King, to whom the Enchanted Lake,

Where from all sources Wisdom ever springs,
Had given unknown the subtle powers that wake

Our intuitions into cloudiest things,
Won but by those, who, after passionate dreams,
Taste the sharp herb and dare the solemn streams.

XXIX.

The Demon heard; and as a moon that shines,

Rising behind Arcturus, cold and still
O'er Baltic headlands black with rigid pines, —

So on his knit and ominous brows a chill
And livid smile, revealed the gloomy night,
To leave the terror, sterner for the light.

XXX.

Thus spoke the Dwarf, "Thou would'st survive to tell
Of trophies wrested from the halls of Lok,
Yet wherefore singly face the hosts of Hell?
Return, and lead thy comrades to the rock;
Never to one, on earth's less dreadful field,
The prize of chiefs do War's fierce Valkyrs yield."

XXXI.

"War," said the King, "is waged on mortal life
By men with men; — *that* dare I with the rest:
In conflicts awful with no human strife,
Mightiest methinks, that soul the loneliest!
When starry charms from Afrite caves were won,
No Judah march'd with dauntless Solomon!"

XXXII.

Fell fangs the demon gnash'd, and o'er the crowd
Wild cumbering round his feet, with hungry stare
Greeding the man, his drooping visage bowed;
"Go elsewhere, sons — your prey escapes the snare:
Yours but the food which flesh to flesh supplies;
Here not the mortal but the soul defies."

XXXIII.

Then striding to the cave, he plung'd within;
 "Follow," he cried, and like a prison'd blast
Along the darkness, the reverberate din,
 Roll'd from the rough sides of the viewless Vast;
As goblin echoes, thro' the haunted hollow,
'Twixt groan and laughter, chim'd hoarse-gibbering "Follow!"

XXXIV.

The King recoiling paused irresolute,
 Till thro' the cave the white wing went its way;
Then on his breast he sign'd the cross, and mute
 With solemn prayer, he left the world of day.
Thick stood the night, save where the falchion gave
Its clear sharp glimmer lengthening down the cave.

XXXV.

Advancing; flashes rush'd irregular
 Like subterranean lightning, fork'd and red:
From warring matter — wandering shot the star
 Of poisonous gases; and the tortured bed
Of th' old Volcano show'd in trailing fires,
Where the numb'd serpent dragged its mangled spires.

XXXVI.

Broader and ruddier on the Dove's pale wings
Now glowed the lava of the widening spaces;
Grinn'd from the rock the jaws of giant things,
The lurid skeletons of vanished races,
They who, perchance ere man himself had birth,
Ruled the moist slime of uncompleted earth.

XXXVII.

Enormous couch'd fang'd Iguanodon,*
To which the monster-lizard of the Nile
Were prey too small, — whose dismal haunts were on
The swamps where now such golden harvests smile
As had sufficed those myriad hosts to feed
When all the Orient march'd behind the Mede

XXXVIII.

There the foul, earliest reptile spectra lay,
Distinct as when the chaos was their home;
Half plant, half serpent, some subside away
Into gnarl'd roots (now stone) — more hideous some
Half bird — half fish — seem struggling yet to spring,
Shark-like the maw, and dragon-like the wing.

* DR. MANTELL, in his *Wonders of Geology*, computes the length of the Iguanodon (formerly an inhabitant of the Wealds of Sussex) at 100 feet.

XXXIX.

But, life-like more, from later layers emerge
With their fell tusks deep-stricken in the stone,
Herds,* that thro' all the thunders of the surge,
Had to the Ark which swept relentless on
(Denied to them) — knell'd the despairing roar
Of sentenced races time shall know no more.

XL.

Under the limbs of mammoths went the path,
Or thro' the arch immense of Dragon jaws,
And ever on the King — in watchful wrath
Gaz'd the attendant Fiend, with artful pause
Where dread was dreadliest; had the mortal one
Faltered or quail'd, the Fiend his prey had won,

XLI.

And rent it limb by limb; but on the Dove
Arthur look'd steadfast, and the Fiend was foil'd.
Now, as along the skeleton world they move,
Strange noises jar, and flit strange shadows. Toil'd
The Troll's** swart people, in their inmost home
At work on ruin for the days to come.

* The Deinotherium — supposed to have been a colossal species of hippopotamus.

** In Scandinavian mythology, the evil spirits are generally called Trolls (or Trolds). The name is here applied to the malignant race of Dwarfs, whose homes were in the earth, and who could not endure the sun.

XLII.

A baleful race, whose anvils forge the flash
Of iron murder for the limbs of war;
Who ripen hostile embryos, for the crash
Of earthquakes rolling slow to towers afar;
Or train from Hecla's fount the lurid rills,
To cities sleeping under shepherd hills;

XLIII.

Or nurse the seeds, thro' patient ages rife
With the full harvest of that crowning fire,
When for the sentenced Three, — Time, Death, and Life,
Our globe itself shall be the funeral pyre;
And, awed in orbs remote some race unknown
Shall miss one star, whose smile had lit their own!

XLIV.

Thro' the Phleggræan glare, innumerable eyes,
Fierce with the murder-lust, scowl ravening,
And forms on which had never look'd the skies
Stalk near and nearer, swooping round the King,
Till from the blazing sword the foul array
Shrink back, and wolf-like follow on the way.

XLV.

Now thro' waste mines of iron, whose black peaks
Frown o'er dull Phlegethons of fire below,
While, vague as worlds unform'd, sulphureous reeks
Roll on before them huge and dun, — they go.
Vanish abrupt the vapours! From the night
Springs, and spreads rushing, like a flood, the light.

XLVI.

A mighty cirque with lustre belts the mine;
Its walls of iron glittering into steel;
Wall upon wall reflected flings the shine
Of armour! Vizorless the Corpses kneel,
Their glaz'd eyes fixed upon a couch where, screen'd
With whispering curtains, sleeps the Kingly Fiend:

XLVII.

Corpses of giants, who perchance had heard
The tromps of Tubal, and had leapt to strife,
Whose guilt provoked the Deluge: sepulchred
In their world's ruins, still a frown like life
Hung o'er vast brows, — and spears like turrets shone
In hands whose grasp had crush'd the Mastodon.

XLVIII.

Around the couch, a silent solemn ring,
They whom the Teuton call the Valkyrs, sate.
Shot thro' pale webs their spindles glistening;
Dread tissues woven out of human hate
For heavenly ends! — for there is spun the woe
Of every war that ever earth shall know.

XLIX.

Below their feet a bottomless pit of gore
Yawned, where each web, when once the woof was done,
Was scornful cast. Yet rising evermore
Out of the surface, wandered airy on
(Till lost in upper space) pale wingèd seeds
The future heaven-fruit of the hell-born deeds;

L.

For out of every evil born of time,
God shapes a good for his eternity.
Lo where the spindles, weaving crime on crime,
Form the world-work of Charlemains to be; —
How in that hall of iron lengthen forth
The fates that ruin, to rebuild, the North!

LI.

Here, one stern Sister smiling on the King,
Hurries the thread that twines his Nation's doom,
And, farther down, the whirring spindles sing
Around the woof which from his Baltic home
Shall charm the avenging Norman, to control
The shattered races into one calm whole.

LII.

Already here, the hueless lines along,
Grows the red creed of the Arabian horde;
Already here, the arm'd Chivalric Wrong
Which made the cross the symbol of the sword,
Which thy worst idol, Rome, to Judah gave,
And worshipp'd Mars upon the Saviour's grave!

LIII.

Already the wild Tartar in his tents,
Dreamless of thrones — and the fierce Visigoth*
Who on Colombia's golden armaments
Shall loose the hell-hounds, — nurse the age-long growth
Of Desolation — as the noiseless skein
Clasps in its web, thy far descendants, Cain!

* Visigoth, *poetice* for the Spanish Ravagers of Mexico and Peru.

LIV.

Already, in the hearts of sires remote

In their rude Isle, the spell ordains the germ
Of what shall be a Name of wonder, wrought

From that fell feast which Glory gives the worm,
When Rome's dark bird shall shade with thunder wings
Calm brows that brood the doom of breathless kings! *

LV.

Already, tho' the sad unheeded eyes

Of Bards alone foresee, and none believe,
The lightning, hoarded from the farthest skies,
Into the mesh the race-destroyers weave,

When o'er our marts shall graze a stranger's fold,
And the new Tarshish rot, as rots the old.

LVI.

Yea, ever there, each spectre hand the birth

Weaves of a war — until the angel-blast
(Peal'd from the tromp that knells the doom of earth)

Shall start the livid legions from their last;
And man, with arm uplifted still to slay,
Reel on some Alp that rolls in smoke away!

* Napoleon.

LVII.

Fierce glared the dwarf upon the silent King,

“There is the prize thy visions would achieve!

There, where the hush'd inexorable ring

Murder the myriads in the webs they weave,
Behind the curtains of Incarnate War,

Whose lightest tremour topples thrones afar, —

LVIII.

“Which even the Valkyrs with their bloodless hands

Ne'er dare aside to draw, — go, seek the Shield!

Yet be what follows known! — yon kneeling bands

Whose camps were Andes, and whose battle-field
Left plains, now empires, rolling seas of gore,
Shall hear the clang and leap to life once more.

LIX.

“Roused from their task, revengeful shall arise

The never baffled ‘Choosers of the Slain,

The Fiend thy hand shall wake, unclothe the eyes

That flash'd on heavenly hosts their storms again,
And thy soul wither in the mighty frown
Before whose night, an earlier sun sunk down.

LX.

“The rocks shall close all path for flight save one,
Where now the Troll-fiends wait to rend their prey,
And each malign and monster skeleton,
Re-clothed with life as in the giant day
When yonder seas were valleys — scent thy gore
And grin with fangs that gnash for food once more.

LXI.

“Ho, dost thou shudder, pale one? Back and live.”
Thrice strove the King for speech, and thrice in vain,
For he was man, and till our souls survive
The instincts born of flesh, shall Horror reign
In that Unknown beyond the realms of Sense,
Where the soul's darkness seems the man's defence.

LXII.

Yet as when thro' uncertain troublous cloud
Breaks the sweet morning star, and from its home
Smiles lofty peace, so thro' the phantom crowd
Of fears — the Eos of the world to come,
FAITH, look'd — revealing how earth-nourish'd are
The clouds; and how beyond their reach the star!

LXIII.

Mute on his knee, amidst the kneeling dead
He sank — the dead the dreaming fiend revered,
And he, the living, God! Then terror fled,
And all the king illumed the front he reared.
Firm to the couch on which the fiend reposed
He strode; — the curtains, murmuring, round him closed.

LXIV.

Now while this chanced, without the tortured rock
Raged fierce the war between the rival might
Of beast and man; the dwarf king's ravenous flock
And Norway's warriors led by Cymri's knight.
For by the foot-prints thro' the snows explor'd,
On to the rock the bands had track'd their lord.

LXV.

Repell'd, not conquered, back to crag and cave,
Sullen and watchful still, the monsters go;
And solitude resettles on the wave,
But silence not; around, aloft, alow
Roar the couch'd beasts, and answering from the main,
Shrieks the shrill gull and booms the dismal crane.

LXVI.

And now the rock itself from every tomb
Of its dead world within, sends voices forth,
Sounds direr far, than in its rayless gloom
Crash on the midnight of the farthest North.
From beasts our world hath lost, the strident yell,
The shout of giants and the laugh of hell.

LXVII.

Reels all the isle; and every ragged steep
Hurls down an avalanche; — all the crater-cave
Glow into swarthy red, and fire-showers leap
From rended summits, hissing to the wave
Thro' its hard ice; or in huge crags, wide-sounding
Spring where they crash — on rushing and rebounding.

LXVIII.

Dizzy and blind, the staggering Northmen fall
On earth that rocks beneath them like a bark;
Loud and more loud the tumult swells with all
The Acheron of the discord. Swift and dark
From every cleft the smoke-clouds burst their way,
Rush thro' the void, and sweep from heaven the day.

LXIX.

Smitten beneath the pestilential blast
And the great terror, senseless lay the band,
Till the arrested life, with throes at last,
Gasp'd back: and holy over sea and land
Silence and light reposed. They looked above,
And calm in calmèd air beheld the Dove!

LXX.

And o'er their prostrate lord was poised the wing;
And when they rush'd and reach'd him, shouting joy,
There came no answer from the corpselike king;
And when his true knight raised him, heavily
Drooped his pale front upon the faithful breast,
And the closed lids seemed leaden in their rest.

LXXI.

And all his mail was dented, hewn, and crush'd,
And the bright falchion dim with foul dark gore;
And the strong pulse of the strong hand was hush'd;
Like a spent storm, that might which seemed before
Charg'd with the bolts of Jove, now from the sky
Drew breath more feeble than an infant's sigh.

LXXII.

And there was solemn change on that fair face,
Nor, whatsoe'er the fear or scorn had been,
Did the past passion leave its haggard trace;
But on the rigid beauty awe was seen,
As one who on the Gorgon's aspect fell,
Had gazed, and freezing, yet survived the spell!

LXXIII.

Not by the chasm in which he left the day,
But through a new-made gorge the fires had cleft,
As if with fires, themselves, were forced the way,
Had rush'd the King; — and sense and sinew left
The form that struggled till the strife was o'er;
So faints the swimmer when he gains the shore.

LXXIV.

But on his arm was clasp'd the wondrous prize,
Dimm'd, tarnished, grimed, and black with gore and smoke,
Still the pure metal, thro' each foul disguise,
Like starlight scattered on dark waters, broke;
Thro' gore, thro' smoke it shone — the silver shield,
Clear as dawns Freedom from her battle-field!

LXXV.

Days followed days, ere from that speechless trance

(Borne to green inlets isled amid the snows

Where led the Dove), the king's reviving glance

Look'd languid round on watchful, joyful brows;

Ev'n while he slept, new flowers the earth had given,

And on his heart brooded the bird of heaven!

LXXVI.

But ne'er as voice and strength and sense returned,

To his good knight the strife that won the Shield

Did Arthur tell; deep in his soul inurned

(As in the grave its secret) nor reveal'd

To mortal ear — that mystery which for ever

Flowed thro' his thought, as thro' the cave a river;

LXXVII.

Whether to Love, how true soe'er its faith,

Whether to Wisdom, whatsoe'er its skill,

Till his last hour the struggle and the scathe

Remained unuttered and unutterable;

But aye, in solitude, in crowds, in strife,

In joy, that memory lived within his life:

LXXVIII.

It made not sadness, tho' the calm grave smile
Never regained the flash that youth had given, —
But as some shadow from a sacred pile
Darkens the earth from shrines that speak of heaven,
That gloom the grandeur of religion wore,
And seemed to hallow all it rested o'er.

LXXIX.

Such Freedom is, O Slave, that would be free!
Never her real struggles into life
Hath History told! As it hath been shall be
The Apocalypse of Nations; nursed in strife
Not with the present, nor with living foes,
But where the centuries shroud their long repose.

LXXX.

Out from the graves of earth's primæval bones,
The shield of empire, patient Force must win:
What made the Briton free? not crashing thrones
Nor parchment laws? The charter must begin
In Scythian tents, the steel of Nomad spears;
To date the freedom, count three thousand years!

LXXXI.

Neither is Freedom, mirth! Be free, O slave,
And dance no more beneath the lazy palm.
Freedom's mild brow with noble care is grave,
Her bliss is solemn as her strength is calm;
And thought mature each childlike sport debars
The forms erect whose look is on the stars.

LXXXII.

Now as the King revived, along the seas
Flowed back, enlarged to life, the lapsing waters,
Kiss'd from their slumber by the loving breeze
Glide, in light dance, the Ocean's silver daughters —
And blithe and hopeful, o'er the sunny strands,
Listing the long-lost billow, rove the bands.

LXXXIII.

At length, O sight of joy! — the gleam of sails
Bursts on the solitude! more near and near
Come the white playmates of the buxom gales. —
The whistling cords, the sounds of man, they hear.
Shout answers shout; — light sparkles round the oar —
And from the barks the boat skims on to shore.

LXXXIV.

It was a race from Rugen's friendly soil,
Leagued by old ties with Cymri's land and king,
Who, with the spring time, to their wonted spoil
Of seals and furs had spread the canvas wing
To bournes their fathers never yet had known; —
And found amazed, hearts bolder than their own.

LXXXV.

Soon to the barks the Cymrians and their bands
Are borne: Bright-hair'd, above the gazing crews,
Lone on the loftiest deck, the leader stands,
To whom the King (his rank made known) renews
All that his tale of mortal hope and fear
Vouchsafes from truth to thrill a mortal's ear;

LXXXVI.

And from the barks whose sails the chief obey,
Craves one to waft where yet the fates may guide. —
With rugged wonder in his large survey,
That calm grand brow the son of Ægir* eyed,
And seemed in awe, as of a god, to scan
Him who so moved his homage, yet was man.

* Ægir, the God of the Ocean, the Scandinavian Neptune.

LXXXVII.

Smoothing his voice, rough with accustom'd swell
Above the storms, and the wild roar of war,
The Northman answered, "Skalds in winter tell
Of the dire dwarf who guards the Shield of Thor,
For one whose race, with Odin's blent, shall be,
Lords of the only realm which suits the Free,

LXXXVIII.

"Ocean! — I greet thee, and this strong right hand
Place in thine own to pledge myself thy man.
Choose as thou wilt for thee and for thy band,
Amongst the sea steeds in the stalls of Ran.
Need'st thou our arms against the Saxon foe?
Our flag shall fly where'er thy trumpets blow!"

LXXXIX.

"Men to be free must free themselves," the King
Replied, proud-smiling. "Every father-land
Spurns from its breast the recreant sons that cling
For hope, to standards winds not their's have fann'd.
Thankful thro' thee our foe we reach; — and then
Cymri hath steel eno' for Cymrian men!"

XC.

While these converse, Sir Gawaine, with his hound,
Lured by a fragrant and delightful smell
From roasts — not meant for Freya, — makes his round,
Shakes hands with all, and hopes their wives are well.
From spit to spit with easy grace he walks,
And chins astounded vanish while he talks.

XCI.

At earliest morn the bark to bear the King,
His sage discernment delicately stores,
Rejects the blubber and disdains the ling
For hams of rein-deers and for heads of boars,
Connives at seal, to satisfy his men,
But childless leaves each loud-lamenting hen.

XCII.

And now the bark the Cymrian prince ascends,
The large oars chiming to the chaunting crew,
(His leal Norwegian band) the new-found friends
From brazen trumpets blare their loud adieu.
Forth bounds the ship, and Gawaine, while it quickens,
The wind propitiates — with three virgin chickens.

XCIII.

Led by the Dove, more brightly day by day,
The vernal azure deepens in the sky;
Far from the Polar threshold smiles the way —
And lo, white Albion shimmers on the eye,
Nurse of all nations, who to breasts severe
Takes the rude children, the calm men to rear.

XCIV.

Doubt and amaze with joy perplex the king,
Not yet the task achieved, the mission done,
Why homeward steers the angel pilot's wing?
Of the three labours rests the crowning one;
Unreached the Iron Gates — Death's sullen hold —
Where waits the Child-guide with the locks of gold.

XCV.

Yet still the Dove cleaves homeward thro' the air;
Glides o'er the entrance of an inland stream;
And rests at last on bowers of foliage, where
Thick forests close their ramparts on the beam;
And clasp with dipping boughs a grassy creek,
Whose marge slopes level with the brazen beak.

XCVI.

Around his neck the shield, the Adventurer slung
And girt the enchanted sword. Then, kneeling, said
The young Ulysses of the golden tongue,
“Not now to phantom foes the dove hath led;
For, if I err not, this a Mercian haven,
And from the dove peeps forth at last the raven!

XCVII.

“Not lone, nor reckless, in these glooms profound,
Tempt the sure ambush of some Saxon host;
If out of sight, at least in reach of sound,
Let our stout Northmen follow up the coast;
Then if thou wilt, from each suspicious tree
Shake laurels down, but share them, Sire, with me?”

XCVIII.

“Nay,” answered Arthur, “ever, as before,
Alone the Pilgrim to his bourne must go;
But range the men concealed along the shore;
Set watch, from these green turrets, for the foe;
Moor’d to the marge where broadest hangs the bough,
Hide from the sun the glitter of the prow; —

XCIX.

“And so farewell!” He said; to land he leapt;
And with dull murmur from its verdant waves,
O’er his high crest the billowy forest swept.
As towards some fitful light the swimmer cleaves
His stalwart way, — so thro’ the woven shades
Where the pale wing now glimmers and now fades,

C.

With strong hand parting the tough branches, goes
Hour after hour the King; till light at last
From skies long hid, wide-silvering, interflows
Thro’ opening glades, — the length of gloom is past,
And the dark pines receding, stand around
A silent hill with antique ruins crown’d.

CI.

Day had long closed; and from the mournful deeps
Of old volcanoes spent, the livid moon
Which thro’ the life of planets lifeless creeps
Her ghostly way, deaf to the choral tune
Of spheres rejoicing, on those ruins old
Look’d down, herself a ruin, — hush’d and cold.

CII.

Mutely the granite wrecks the king survey'd,
And knew the work of hands Cimmerian,
What time in starry robes, and awe, array'd,
Grey Druids spoke the oracles of man —
Solving high riddles to Chaldean Mage,
Or the young wonder of the Samian Sage.

CIII.

A date remounting far beyond the day
When Roman legions met the scythèd cars,
When purer founts sublime had lapsed away
Thro' the deep rents of unrecorded wars,
And bloodstained altars cursed the mountain sod,
Where* the first faith had hail'd the only God.

CIV.

For all now left us of the parent Celt,
Is of that later and corrupter time, —
Not in rude domeless fanes those Fathers knelt,
Who lured the Brahman from his burning clime,
Who charm'd lost science from each lone abyss,
And wing'd the shaft of Scythian Abaris.**

* See Note appended to the end of this book.

** The arrow of Abaris (which bore him where he pleased) is supposed by some to have been the loadstone. And Abaris himself has been, by some ingenious speculators, identified with a Druid philosopher.

CV.

Yea, the grand sires of our primæval race
Saw angel tracks the earlier earth upon,
And as a rising sun, the morning face
Of Truth more near the flush'd horizon shone.
Filling ev'n clouds with many a golden light,
Lost when the orb is at the noonday height.

CVI.

Thro' the large ruins (now no more), the last
Perchance on earth of those diviner sires,
With noiseless step the lone descendant past;
Not there were seen BAL-HUAN'S amber pyres;
No circling shafts with barbarous fragments strown,
Spoke creeds of carnage to the spectral moon.

CVII.

But art, vast, simple, and sublime, was there
Ev'n in its mournful wrecks, — such art foregone
As the first Builders, when their grand despair
Left Shinar's tower and city half undone,
Taught where they wander'd o'er the newborn world. —
Column, and vault, and roof, in ruin hurl'd,

CVIII.

Still spoke of hands that founded Babylon!

So in the wrecks, the Lord of young Romance
By fallen pillars laid him musing down.

More large and large the moving shades advance,
Blending in one dim silence sad and wan
The past, the present, ruin and the man.

CIX.

Now, o'er his lids life's gentlest influence stole,

Life's gentlest influence yet the likest death!
That nightly proof how little needs the soul

Light from the sense, or being from the breath,
When all life knows a life unknown supplies,
And airy worlds around a Spirit rise.

CX.

Still thro' the hazy mists of stealing sleep,

His eyes explore the watchful guardian's wing,
There, where it broods upon the moss-grown heap,
With plumes that all the stars are silvering.

Slow close the lids — reopening with a start
As shoots a nameless terror thro' his heart.

CXI.

That strange wild awe which haunted Childhood thrills.

When waking at the dead of Dark, alone;

A sense of sudden solitude which chills

The blood; — a shrinking as from shapes unknown;

An instinct both of some protection fled,

And of the coming of some ghastly dread.

CXII.

He looked, and lo, the dove was 'seen no more,

Lone lay the lifeless wrecks beneath the moon,

And the one loss gave all that seemed before

Desolate, — twofold desolation!

How slight a thing, whose love our trust has been,

Alters the world, when it no more is seen!

CXIII.

He strove to speak, but voice was gone from him.

As in that loss, new might the terror took,

His veins congeal'd; and, interfused and dim,

Shadow and moonlight swam before his look;

Bristled his hair; and all the strong dismay

Seized as an eagle when it grasps its prey.

CXIV.

Senses and soul confused, and jarr'd, and blent,
Lay crush'd beneath the intolerable Power;
Then over all, one flash, in lightning, rent
The veil between the Immortal and the Hour;
Life heard the voice of unembodied breath,
And Sleep stood trembling face to face with Death.

NOTE TO BOOK X.

*“And blood-stained altars cursed the mountain sod,
Where the first faith had hail’d the only God.”*

Page 159, stanza civ.

THE testimony to be found in classical writers as to the original purity of the Druid worship, before it was corrupted into the idolatry which existed in Britain at the time of the Roman conquest, is strongly corroborated by the Welch triads. These triads, indeed, are of various dates, but some bear the mark of a very remote antiquity — wholly distinct alike from the philosophy of the Romans, and the mode of thought prevalent in the earlier ages of the Christian era; in short, anterior to all the recorded conquests over the Cymrian people. These, like proverbs, appear the wrecks and fragments of some primæval ethics, or philosophical religion. Nor are such remarkable alone for the purity of the notions they inculcate relative to the Deity; they have often, upon matters less spiritual,

the delicate observation, as well as the profound thought, of reflective wisdom. It is easy to see in them, how identified was the Bard with the Sage — that rare union which produces the highest kind of human knowledge. Such, perhaps, are the relics of that sublimer learning which, ages before the sacrifice of victims in wicker-idols, won for the Druids the admiration of the cautious Aristotle, as ranking among the true enlighteners of men — such the teachers who (we may suppose to have) instructed the mystical Pythagoras; and furnished new themes for meditation to the musing Brahman. Nor were the Druids of Britain inferior to those with whom the Sages of the western and eastern world came more in contact. On the contrary, even to the time of Cæsar, the Druids of Britain excelled in science and repute those in Gaul: and to their schools the Neophytes of the Continent were sent.

In the Stanzas that follow the description of the more primitive Cymrians, it is assumed that the rude Druid remains *now* existent (as at Stonehenge, &c.), are coeval only with the later and corrupted state of a people degenerated to idol worship, and that they previously possessed an architecture, of which no trace now remains, more suited to their early civilization. If it be true that they worshipped the Deity only in his own works, and that it was not until what had been a symbol passed into an idol, that they deserted the mountain top and the forest for the temple, they would certainly have wanted

the main inducement to permanent and lofty architecture. Still it may be allowed, at least to a poet, to suppose that men so sensible as the primitive Saronides, would have held their schools and colleges in places more adapted to a northern climate than their favourite oak groves.

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK XI.

ARGUMENT.

The Siege of Carduel — The Saxon forces — Stanzas relative to Ludovick the Vandal, in explanation of the failure of his promised aid, and in description of the events in Vandal-land — The preparations of the Saxon host for the final assault on the City, under cover of the approaching night — The state of Carduel — Discord — Despondence — Famine — The apparent impossibility to resist the coming Enemy — Dialogue between Caradoc and Merlin — Caradoc hears his sentence, and is resigned — He unstrings his harp and descends into the town — The Progress of Song; in its effects upon the multitude — Caradoc's address to the people he has roused, and the rush to the Council Hall — Meanwhile the Saxons reach the walls — The burst of the Cymrians — The Saxons retire into the plain between the Camp and the City, and there take their stand — The battle described — The single combat between Lancelot and Harold — Crida leads on his reserve; the Cymrians take alarm and waver — The prediction invented by the noble devotion of Caradoc — His fate — The enthusiasm of the Cymrians and the retreat of the enemy to their Camp — The first entrance of a Happy Soul into Heaven — The Ghost that appears to Arthur, and leads him through the Cimmerian tomb to the Realm of Death — The sense of time and space are annihilated — Death, the Phantasmal Everywhere — Its brevity and nothingness — The condition of soul is life, whether here or hereafter — Fate and Nature identical — Arthur accosted by his Guardian Angel — After the address of that Angel (which in truth represents what we call Conscience), Arthur loses his former fear both of the realm and the Phantom — He addresses the Ghost, which vanishes without reply to his question — The last boon — The destined Soother — Arthur recovering as from a trance, sees the Maiden of the Tomb — Her description — The Dove is beheld no more — Strange resemblance between the Maiden and the Dove — Arthur is led to his ship, and sails at once for Carduel — He arrives on the Cymrian territory, and lands with Gawaine and the Maiden near Carduel, amidst the ruins of a hamlet devastated by the Saxons — He seeks a convent, of which only one tower, built by the Romans, remains — From the hill top he surveys the walls of Carduel and the Saxon encampment — The appearance of the holy Abbess, who recognizes the king, and conducts him and his companions to the subterranean grottoes built by the Romans for a summer retreat — He leaves the Maiden to the care of the Abbess, and concert with Gawaine the scheme for attack on the Saxons — The Virgin is conducted to the cell of the Abbess — Her thoughts and recollections, which explain her history — Her resolution — She attempts to escape — Meets the Abbess, who hangs the Cross round her neck, and blesses her — She departs to the Saxon Camp.

BOOK XI.

I.

KING CRIDA'S hosts are storming Carduel!

From vale to mount one world of armour shines,
Round castled piles* for which the forest fell,
Spreads the white war town of the Teuton lines;
To countless clarions, countless standards swell;
King Crida's hosts are storming Carduel!

* The Saxons appear from a very remote period to have fortified their encampments by palisades and strong works of timber. In the centre of these it was the custom of the Teuton tribes to erect a rude fastness for their gods and women. In the latter times of Anglo-Saxon warfare, when, established in the land, their armies ceased to fight for settlements, and their idols and women did not accompany them, this latter custom naturally ceased, though they always retained the relics of the habit in a strong central position, formed by waggon and barricades. Even in the open battle-field, the Teutons (especially of Scandinavia) were tenacious of a temporary stronghold, which formed the nucleus of their array, selecting generally a rising ground, ramparted with shields, in which the king stationed himself with his reserve.

II.

There, all its floods the Saxon deluge pours;

All the fierce tribes; from those whose fathers first
With their red seaxes from the southward shores,

Carved realms for Hengist, — to the bands that burst
Along the Humber, on the idle wall

Rome built for manhood rotted by her thrall.

III.

There, wild allies from many a kindred race,

In Cymrian lands hail Teuton thrones to be:

Dark Jutland wails her absent populace, —

And large-limb'd sons, his waves no more shall see,
Leave Danube desolate! afar they roam,

Where halts the Raven there to find a home!

IV.

But wherefore fail the Vandal's promised bands?

Well said the Greek, 'not till his latest hour
Deem man secure from Fortune;' in our hands

We clutch the sunbeam when we grasp at power; —
No strength detains the unsubstantial prize,
The light escapes us as the moment flies.

V.

And monarchs envied Ludovick the Great!

And Wisdom's seers his wiles did wisdom call,
And Force stood sentry at his castle gate;

And Mammon soothed the murmurers in the hall;
For Freedom's forms disguised the despot's thought —
He ruled by synods — and the synods bought!

VI.

Yet empires rest not on gold or steel;

The old in habit strike the gnarlèd root;
But vigorous faith — the young fresh sap of zeal,
Must make the life-blood of the planted shoot —
And new-born states, like new religions, need
Not the dull code, but the impassion'd creed.

VII.

Give but a cause, a child may be a chief!

What cause to hosts can Ludovick supply?
Swift flies the Element of Power, *Belief*,
From all foundations hollowed to a lie.
One morn, a riot in the streets-arose,
And left the Vandal crownless at the close.

VIII.

A plump of spears the riot could have crush'd!

“Defend the throne, my spearmen!” cried the king.

The spearmen armed, and forth the spearmen rush'd,

When woe! they took to reason on the thing!

And then conviction smote them on the spot,

That for that throne they did not care a jot.

IX.

With scuff and scum, with urchins loosed from school,

Thieves, gleemen, jugglers, beggars, swelled the riot;

While, like the gods of Epicurus, cool

On crowd, and crown — the spearmen looked in quiet;

Till all its heads that Hydra call'd ‘The Many,’

Stretch'd hissing forth, without a stroke at any.

X.

At first Astutio, wrong but very wise,

Disdain'd the Hydra as a fabled creature,

The vague invention of a Poet's lies,

Unknown to Pliny and the laws of Nature —

Nor till the fact was past philosophizing,

Saith he, “That 's Hydra, there is no disguising!

XI.

“A Hydra, Sire, a Hercules demands,
So if not Hercules, assume his vizard.”
The advice is good — the Vandal wrings his hands,
Kicks out the Sage — and rushes to a wizard.
The wizard waves his wand — disarms the sentry,
And (wondrous man) enchants the mob — with entry.

XII.

Thus fell, tho' no man touch'd him, Ludovick,
Tripp'd by the slide of his own slippery feet.
The crown cajol'd from Fortune by a trick,
Fortune, in turn, outcheated from the cheat;
Clapp'd her sly cap the glittering bauble on,
Cried “Presto!” — raised it — and the gaud was gone!

XIII.

Ev'n at the last, to self and nature true,
No royal heart the breath of danger woke;
To mean disguise habitual instinct flew,
And the king vanished in a craftsman's cloak.
While his brave princes scampering for their lives,
Relictis parmulis — forgot their wives!

XIV.

King Mob succeeding to the vacant throne,
Chose for his ministers some wise Chaldeans, —
Who told the sun to close the day at noon,
Nor sweat to death his betters the plebeians;
And bade the earth, unvexed by plough and spade,
Bring forth its wheat in quarters ready made.

XV.

The sun refused the astronomic feat;
The earth declined to bake the corn it grew;
King Mob then ordered that a second riot
Should teach Creation what it had to do.
“The sun shines on, the earth demands the tillage,
Down Time and Nature, and hurrah for pillage!”

XVI.

Then rise *en masse* the burghers of the town;
Each patriot breast the fires of Brutus fill;
Gentle as lambs when riot reach'd the crown,
They raged like lions when it touch'd the till.
Rush'd all who boasted of a shop to rob,
And stout King Money soon dethron'd King Mob.

XVII.

This done, much scandalized to note the fact,
That o'er the short tyrannic rise the tall,
The middle-sized a penal law enact
That henceforth height muts be the same in all;
For being each born equal with the other,
What greater crime than to outgrow your brother?

XVIII.

Poor Vandals, do the towers, when foes assail,
So idly soar above the level wall?
Harmonious Order needs its music-scale;
The Equal were the discord of the All.
Let the wave undulate, the mountain rise;
Nor ask from Law what Nature's self denies.

XIX.

O vagrant Muse, deserting all too long,
Freedom's grand war for frenzy's goblin dream,
The hour runs on, and redemands from song,
And from our Father-land the mighty theme.
The Pale Horse rushes and the trumpets swell,
King Crida's hosts are storming Carduel!

XX.

Within the inmost fort the pine-trees made,
The hardy women kneel to warrior gods.
For where the Saxons armaments invade,
All life abandons their resign'd abodes.
The tents they pitch the all they prize contain;
And each new march is for a new domain.

XXI.

To the stern gods the fair-hair'd women kneel,
As slow to rest the red sun glides along;
And near and far, hammers, and clanking steel,
Neighs from impatient barbs, and runic song
Mutter'd o'er mystic fires by wizard priests,
Invite the Valkyrs to the raven feasts.

XXII.

For after nine long moons of siege and storm,
Thy hold, Pendragon, trembles to its fall!
Loftier the Roman tower uprears its form,
From the crush'd bastion and the shatter'd wall,
And but till night those iron floods delay
Their rush of thunder: — Blood-red sinks the day.

XXIII.

Death halts to strike, and swift the moment flies:

Within the walls, (than all without more fell,)
Discord with Babel tongues confounds the wise,
And spectral Panic, like a form of hell
Chased by a Fury, fleets, — or, stone-like, stands
Dull-eyed Despondence, palsyng nerveless hands.

XXIV.

And Pride, that evil angel of the Celt,

Whispers to all "'t is servile to obey,"
Robs ordered Union of its starry belt,
Rends chief from chief and tribe from tribe away,
And leaves the children wrangling for command
Round the wild death-throes of the Father-land.

XXV.

In breadless marts, the ill-persuading fiend

Famine, stalks maddening with her wolfish stare;
And hearts, on whose stout anchors Faith had lean'd,
Bound at her look to treason from despair,
Shouting, "Why shrink we from the Saxon's thrall?
Is slavery worse than Famine smiting all?"

XXVI.

Thus, in the absence of the sunlike king,

All phantoms stalk abroad; dissolve and droop
Light and the life of nations — while the wing
Of carnage halts but for its rushing swoop.

Some moan, some rave, some laze the hours away; —
And down from Carduel blood-red sunk the day!

XXVII.

Leaning against a broken parapet

Alone with Thought, mused Caradoc the Bard,
When a voice smote him, and he turned and met
A gaze prophetic in its sad regard.

Beside him, solemn with his hundred years,
Stood the arch hierarch of the Cymrian seers.

XXVIII.

“Dost thou remember,” said the Sage, “that hour
When seeking signs to Glory’s distant way,
Thou heard’st the night bird in her leafy bower,
Singing sweet death-chaunts to her shining prey,
While thy young poet-heart, with ravished breath,
Hung on the music, nor divin’d the death?” *

* See Book ii., pp. 68-9, from stanza xxvii. to stanza xxx.

XXIX.

“Ay,” the bard answer’d, “and ev’n now methought

I heard again the ambrosial melody!”

“So,” sigh’d the Prophet, “to the bard, unsought,

Come the far whispers of Futurity!

Like his own harp, his soul a wind can thrill,

And the chord murmur, tho’ the hand be still.

XXX.

“Wilt thou for ever, even from the tomb,

Live, yet a music, in the hearts of all;

Arise and save thy country from its doom;

Arise, Immortal, at the angel’s call!

The hour shall give thee all thy life implor’d,

And make the lyre more glorious than the sword.

XXXI.

“In vain thro’ yon dull stupour of despair

Sound Geraint’s tromp and Owaine’s battle cry;

In vain where yon rude clamour storms the air,

The Council Chiefs stem mad’ning mutiny;

From Trystan’s mail the lion heart is gone,

And on the breach stands Lancelot alone!

XXXII.

“Drivelling the wise, and impotent the strong;
Fast into night the life of Freedom dies;
Awake Light-Bringer, wake bright soul of song,
Kindler, reviver, re-creator rise!
Crown thy great mission with thy parting breath,
And teach to hosts the Bard’s disdain of death!”

XXXIII.

Thrill’d at that voice the soul of Caradoc;
He heard, and knew his glory and his doom.
As when in summer’s noon the lightning shock
Smites some fair elm in all its pomp of bloom,
Mid whose green boughs each vernal breeze had play’d,
And air’s sweet race melodious homes had made;

XXXIV.

So that young life bow’d sad beneath the stroke
That sear’d the Fresh and still’d the Musical,
Yet on the sadness thought sublimely broke:
Holy the tree on which the bolt doth fall!
Wild flowers shall spring the sacred roots around,
And nightly fairies tread the haunted ground;

XXXV.

There, age by age, shall youth with musing brow,
Hear Legend murmuring of the days of yore;
There, virgin love more lasting deem the vow
Breath'd in the shade of branches green no more;
And kind Religion keep the grand decay
Still on the earth while forests pass away.

XXXVI.

"So be it, O voice from Heaven," the Bard replied,
"Some grateful tears may yet embalm my name,
Ever for human love my youth hath sigh'd,
And human love's divinest form is fame.
Is the dream erring? shall the song remain?
Say, can one Poet ever live in vain?"

XXXVII.

As the warm south on some unfathom'd sea,
Along the Magian's soul, the awful rest
Stirr'd with the soft emotion: tenderly
He laid his hand upon the brows he blest,
And said, "Complete beneath a brighter sun
That course, The Beautiful, which life begun.

XXXVIII.

“Joyous and light, and fetterless thro’ all

The blissful, infinite, empyreal space,

If then thy spirit stoopeth to recall

The ray it shed upon the human race,

See where the ray had kindled from the dearth,

Seeds that shall glad the garnerers of the earth!

XXXIX.

“Never true Poet lived and sung in vain!

Lost if his name, and withered if his wreath,

The thoughts he woke — an element remain

Fused in our light and blended with our breath;

All life more noble, and all earth more fair,

Because that soul refined man’s common air!”*

XL.

Then rose the Bard, and smilingly unstrung

His harp of ivory sheen, from shoulders broad,

Kissing the hand that doom’d his life, he sprung

Light from the shatter’d wall, — and swiftly strode

Where, herdlike huddled in the central space,

Droop’d, in dull pause, the cowering populace.

* Perhaps it is in this sense that Taliessin speaks in his mystical poem, called “Taliessin’s History,” still extant:

“I have been an instructor

To the whole universe.

I shall remain till the day of doom

On the face of the earth.”

XLI.

There, in the midst he stood! The heavens were pale
With the first stars, unseen amidst the glare
Cast from large pine-brands on the sullen mail
Of listless legions, and the streaming hair
Of women, wailing for the absent dead,
Or bow'd o'er infant lips that moan'd for bread.

XLII.

From out the illumed cathedral hollowly
Swell'd, like a dirge, the hymn; and thro' the throng
Whose looks had lost all commerce with the sky,
With lifted rood the slow monks swept along,
And vanish'd hopeless: From those wrecks of man
Fled ev'n Religion: — Then the BARD began.

XLIII.

Slow, pitying, soft it glides, the liquid lay,
Sad with the burthen of the Singer's soul;
Into the heart it coil'd its lulling way;
Wave upon wave the golden river stole;
Hush'd to his feet forgetful Famine crept,
And Woe, reviving, veil'd the eyes that wept.

XLIV.

Then stern, and harsh, clash'd the ascending strain,
Telling of ills more dismal yet in store;
Rough with the iron of the grinding chain,
Dire with the curse of slavery evermore;
Wild shrieks from lips beloved pale warriors hear,
Her child's last death-groan rends the mother's ear;

XLV.

Then trembling hands instinctive griped the swords;
And men unquiet sought each other's eyes;
Loud into pomp sonorous swell the chords,
Like linkèd legions march the melodies;
Till the full rapture swept the Bard along,
And o'er the listeners rush'd the storm of song!

XLVI.

And the Dead spoke! From cairns and kingly graves
The Heroes call'd; — and Saints from earliest shrines;
And the Land spoke! — Mellifluous river-waves;
Dim forests awful with the roar of pines;
Mysterious caves from legend-haunted deeps;
And torrents flashing from untrodden steeps; —

XLVII.

THE LAND OF FREEDOM call'd upon the Free!

All Nature spoke; the clarions of the wind;
The organ swell of the majestic sea;

The choral stars; the Universal Mind
Spoke, like the voice from which the world began,
"No chain for Nature and the Soul of Man!"

XLVIII.

Then loud thro' all, as if mankind's reply,

Burst from the Bard the Cymrian battle hymn!

That song which swell'd the anthems of the Sky,

The Alleluia of the Seraphim;

When Saints led on the Children of the Lord,

And smote the Heathen with the Angel's sword.*

* The Bishops, Germanus and Lupus, having baptized the Britons in the River Alyn, led them against the Picts and Saxons, to the cry of "Alleluia." The cry itself, uttered with all the enthusiasm of the Christian host, struck terror into the enemy, who at once took to flight. Most of those who escaped the sword perished in the river. This victory, achieved at Maes-Garmon, was called "Victoria Alleluiatica." BRIT. ECCLES. ANTIQ., 335; BED., lib. i., c. i., 20.

XLIX.

As leaps the warfire on the beacon hills,
Leapt in each heart the lofty flame divine;
As into sunlight flash the molten rills,
Flash'd the glad claymores,* lightening line on line;
From cloud to cloud as thunder speeds along,
From rank to rank — rush'd forth the choral song. —

L.

Woman and child — all caught the fire of men,
To its own heaven that Alleluia rang,
Life to the spectres had returned agen;
And from the grave an armed Nation sprang!
Then spoke the Bard, — each crest its plumage bow'd,
As the large voice went lengthening thro' the crowd.

LI.

“Hark to the measured march! — The Saxons come!
The sound earth quails beneath the hollow tread!
Your fathers rush'd upon the swords of Rome
And climb'd her war-ships — when the Cæsar fled!
The Saxons come! why wait within the wall?
They scale the mountain: — let its torrents fall!

* “The claymore of the Highlanders of Scotland was no other than the cledd mawr (cle'mawr) of the Welch.” CYMRODORION, vol. ii., p. 106.

LII.

“Mark, ye have swords, and shields, and armour, YE!

No mail defends the Cymrian Child of Song,*

But where the warrior — there the Bard shall be!

All fields of glory to the Bard belong!

His realm extends wherever god-like strife

Spurns the base death, and wins immortal life.

LIII.

“Unarmed he goes — his guard the shields of all,

Where he bounds foremost on the Saxon spear!

Unarmed he goes, that, falling, ev’n his fall

Shall bring no shame, and shall bequeath no fear!

Does the song cease? — avenge it by the deed,

And make the sepulchre — a nation freed!”

LIV.

He said, and where the chieftains wrangling sate,

Led the grand army marshall’d by his song;

Into the hall — and on the wild debate,

King of all kings, A PEOPLE, poured along;

And from the heart of man — the trumpet cry

Smote faction down, “Arms, arms, and liberty!” —

* No Cymrian bard, according to the primitive law, was allowed the use of weapons.

LV.

Meanwhile roll'd on the Saxon's long array;
On to the wall the surge of slaughter roll'd;
Slow up the mount — slow heaved its awful way;
The moonlight rested on the domes of gold;
No warder peals alarum from the Keep,
And Death comes mute, as on the realm of Sleep;

LVI.

When, as their ladders touch'd the ruined wall,
And to the van, high-towering, Harold strode,
Sudden expand the brazen gates, and all
The awful arch as with the lava glow'd;
Torch upon torch the deathful sweep illumes,
The burst of armour and the flash of plumes!

LVII.

Rings Owaine's shout; — rings Geraint's thunder-cry;
The Saxons death-knell in a hundred wars;
And Cador's laugh of joy; — rush through the sky
Bright tossing banderolls — swift as shooting stars. —
Trystan's white lion — Lancelot's cross of red,
And Tudor's* standard with the Saxon's head.

* The old arms of the Tudors were three Saxons' heads.

LVIII.

And high o'er all, its scaled splendour rears
The vengeful emblem of the Dragon Kings.
Full on the Saxon bursts the storm of spears;
Far down the vale the charging whirlwind rings;
While thro' the ranks its barbed knighthood clave,
All Carduel follows with its roaring wave.

LIX.

And ever in the van, with robes of white
And ivory harp, shone swordless Caradoc!
And ever floated in melodious night,
The clear song buoyant o'er the battle shock;
Calm as an eagle when the Olympian King
Sends the red bolt upon the tranquil wing.

LX.

Borne back, and wedged within the ponderous weight
Of their own jarr'd and multitudinous crowd,
Recoil'd the Saxons! As adown the height
Of some grey mountain, rolls the cloven cloud,
Smit by the shafts of the resistless day, —
Down to the vale sunk dun the rent array.

LXI.

Midway between the camp and Carduel,
Halting their slow retreat, the Saxons stood;
There, as the wall-like ocean ere it fell
On Ægypt's chariots, gathered up the flood;
There, in suspended deluge, solid rose,
And hung expectant o'er the hurrying foes!

LXII.

Right in the centre, rampired round with shields,
King Crida stood, — o'er him, its livid mane
The horse whose pasture is the Valkyr's fields
Flung wide; — but, foremost thro' the javelin-rain,
Blaz'd Harold's helm, as when, thro' all the stars
Distinct, pale soothsayers see the dooming Mars.

LXIII.

Down dazzling sweeps the Cymrian Chivalry;
Round the bright sweep closes the Saxon wall;
Snatch'd from the glimmer of the funeral sky,
Raves the blind murder; and enclasp'd with all
Its own stern hell, against the iron bar
Pants the fierce heart of the imprisoned War.

LXIV.

Only by gleaming banners and the flash
Of some large sword, the vex'd Obscure once more
Sparkled to light. In one tumultuous clash
Merg'd every sound — as when the maëlström's roar
By dire Lofoden, dulls the seaman's groan,
And drowns the voice of tempests in its own.

LXV.

The Cymrian ranks, — disparted from their van,
And their hemm'd horsemen, — stubborn, but in vain,
Press thro' the levelled spears; yet, man by man,
And shield to shield close-serried, they sustain
The sleeting hail against them hurtling sent,
From every cloud in that dread armament.

LXVI.

But now, at length, cleaving the solid clang,
And o'er the dead men in their frowning sleep,
The rallying shouts of chiefs confronted rang
“Thor and Walhalla!” — answered swift and deep
By “Alleluia!” and thy chaunted cry,
Young Bard sublime, “For Christ and Liberty!”

LXVII.

Then the ranks opened, and the midnight moon
Streamed where the battle, like the scornful main,
Ebb'd from the dismal wrecks its wrath had strown.
Paused either host; — lo, in the central plain
Two chiefs had met, and in that breathless pause,
Each to its champion left a Nation's cause.

LXVIII.

Now, heaven defend thee, noble Lancelot!
For never yet such danger thee befell,
Tho' loftier deeds than thine emblazon not
The peerless Twelve of golden Carduel,
Tho' oft thy breast hath singly stemm'd a field, —
As when thy claymore clanged on Harold's shield!

LXIX.

And Lancelot knew not his majestic foe,
Save by his deeds; by Cador's cloven crest;
By Modred's corpse; by rills of blood below,
And shrinking helms above; — when from the rest
Spurring, — the steel of his uplifted brand
Drew down the lightening of that red right hand.

LXX.

Full on the Saxon's shield the sword descends;
The strong shield clattering shivers at the stroke,
And the bright crest with all its plumage bends,
As to the blast with all its boughs an oak:
As from the blast an oak with all its boughs,
Retowering slow, the crest sublime arose.

LXXI.

Grasp'd with both hands, above the Cymrian swung
The axe that Woden taught his sons to wield,
Thrice thro' the air the circling iron sung,
Then crash'd resounding: — horse and horseman reel'd,
Tho' slant from sword and casque the weapon shore,
Down sword and casque the weight resistless bore.

LXXII.

The bright plume mingles with the charger's mane;
Light leaves the heaven, and sense forsakes the breath;
Aloft the axe impatient whirrs again, —
The steed wild-snorting bounds and foils the death;
While on its neck the reins unheeded flow,
It shames and saves its Lord, and flies the foe.

LXXIII.

“Lo, Saxons, lo, what chiefs these Walloons* lead!”

Laugh'd hollow from his helm the scornful Thane.

Then towards the Christian knights he spurr'd his steed

When midway in his rush — rushes again

The foe that rallied while he seemed to fly,

As wheels the falcon ere it swoops from high; —

LXXIV.

And as the falcon, while its talons dart

Into the crane's broad bosom, splits its own

On the sharp beak, and, clinging heart to heart,

Both in one plumage blent, spin whirling down, —

So in that shock each found, and dealt the blow;

Horse roll'd on horse, fell grappling foe on foe.

LXXV.

First to his feet the slighter Cymrian leapt,

And on the Saxon's breast set firm his knee;

Then o'er the heathen host a shudder crept,

Rose all their voices, — wild and wailingly;

“Woe, Harold, woe!” as from one bosom came,

The groan of thousands, and the mighty name.

* Walloons, — the name given by the Saxons, in contumely, to the Cymrians.

LXXVI.

The Cymrian starts, and stays his lifted hand,
For at that name from Harold's vizor shone
Genevra's eyes! Back in its sheath the brand
He plung'd: — sprang Harold — and the foe was gone, —
Lost where the Saxons rush'd along the plain,
To save the living or avenge the slain.

LXXVII.

Spurr'd to the rescue every Cymrian knight,
Again confused, the onslaught raged on high;
Again the war-shout swell'd above the fight,
Again the chaunt "for Christ and Liberty,"
When with fresh hosts unbreath'd, the Saxon king
Forth from the wall of shields leapt thundering.

LXXVIII.

Behind the chief the dreadful gonfanon
Spread; — the Pale Horse went rushing down the wind. —
"On where the Valkyrs rest on Carduel, on!
On o'er the corpses to the wolf consign'd!
On, that the Pale Horse, ere the night be o'er,
Stall'd in yon tower, may rest his hoofs of gore!"

LXXIX.

Thus spoke the king, and all his hosts replied;

Fill'd by his word and kindled by his look —

For helmless with his grey hair streaming wide,

He strided thro' the spears — the mountains shook —

Shook the dim city — as that answer rang!

The fierce shout chiming to the buckler's clang!

LXXX.

Aghast, the Cymrians see, like Titan sons

New-born from earth, — leap forth the sudden bands:

As when the wind's invisible tremour runs

Thro' corn-sheaves ripening for the reaper's hands,

The glittering tumult undulating flows,

And the field quivers where the panic goes.

LXXXI.

The Cymrians waver — shrink — recoil — give way,

Strike with weak hands amazed; half turn to flee;

In vain with knightly charge the chiefs delay

The hostile mass that rolls resistlessly,

And the pale hoofs for aye had trampled down

The Cymrian freedom and the Dragon Crown,

LXXXII.

But for that arch preserver, — under heaven,
Of names and states, the Bard! the hour was come
To prove the ends for which the lyre was given: —
Each thought divine demands its martyrdom.
Where round the central standard rallying flock
The Dragon Chiefs — paused and spoke Caradoc!

LXXXIII.

“Ye Cymrian men!” Hushed at the calm sweet sound,
Droop’d the wild murmur, bow’d the loftiest crest,
Meekly the haughty paladins group’d round
The swordless hero with the mailless breast,
Whose front, serene amid the spears, had taught
To humbled Force the chivalry of Thought.

LXXXIV.

“Ye Cymrian men — from Heus the Guardian’s tomb
I speak the oracular promise of the Past.
Fear not the Saxon! Till the judgment doom,
Free on their hills the Dragon race shall last,
If from yon heathen, ye this night can save
One spot not wider than a single grave.

LXXXV.

“For thus the antique prophecy’s decree, —

‘When where the Pale Horse crushes down the dead,
War’s sons shall see the lonely child of peace

Grasp at the mane to fall beneath the tread —
There where he falleth let his dust remain,
There bid the Dragon rest above the slain;

LXXXVI.

“‘There let the steel-clad living watch the clay,

Till on that spot their swords the grave have made,
And the Pale Horse shall melt in cloud away,

No stranger’s step the sacred mound invade:
A people’s life that single death shall save,
And all the land be hallowed by the grave.’

LXXXVII.

“So be the Guardian’s prophecy fulfill’d,

Advance the Dragon, for the grave is mine.”
He ceased; while yet the silver accents thrill’d

Each mailèd bosom down the listening line
Bounded his steed, and like an arrow went
His plume, swift glancing thro’ the armament.

LXXXVIII.

On thro' the tempest went it glimmering,
On thro' the rushing barbs and levelled spears;
On where, far streaming o'er the Teuton king,
Its horrent pomp the ghastly standard rears.
On rush'd to rescue all to whom his breath
Left what saves Nations, — the disdain of death!

LXXXIX.

Alike the loftiest knight and meanest man,
All the rous'd host, but now so panic-chill'd,
All Cymri once more as one Cymrian,
With the last light of that grand spirit fill'd,
Thro' rank on rank, mow'd down, down trampled, sped,
And reach'd the standard — to defend the dead.

XC.

Wrench'd from the heathen's hand, one moment bow'd
In the bright Christian's grasp the gonfanon;
Then from a dumb amaze the countless crowd
Swept, — and the night as with a sudden sun
Flash'd with avenging steel; life gained its goal,
And calm from lips proud-smiling went the soul!

XCI.

Leapt from his selle, the king-born Lancelot;
Leapt from the selle each paladin and knight;
In one mute sign that where upon that spot
The foot was planted, God forbade the flight:
There shall the Father-land avenge the son,
Or heap all Cymri round the grave of one.

XCII.

Then, well nigh side by side — broad floated forth
The Cymrian Dragon and the Teuton Steed,
The rival Powers that struggle for the north;
The gory Idol — the chivalric Creed;
Odin's and Christ's confronting flags unfurl'd,
As which should save and which destroy a world!

XCIII.

Then fought those Cymrian men, as if on each
All Cymri set its last undaunted hope;
Thro' the steel bulwarks round them yawns the breach;
Vistas to freedom brightning onwards ope;
Crida in vain leads band on slaughtered band,
In vain revived falls Harold's ruthless hand;

XCIV.

As on the bull the pard will fearless bound,
But if the horn that meets the spring should gore,
Aw'd with fierce pain, slinks snarling from the ground; —
So baffled in their midmost rush, before
The abrupt assault, the savage hosts give way,
Yet will not own that man could thus dismay.

XCV.

“Some God more mighty than Walhalla's king,
Strikes in yon arms” — the sullen murmurs run,
And fast and faster drives the Dragon wing —
And shrinks and cowers the ghastly gonfanon,
They flag — they falter — lo, the Saxons fly! —
Lone rests the Dragon in the dawning sky!

XCVI.

Lone rests the Dragon with its wings outspread,
Where the pale hoofs one holy ground had trod,
There the hush'd victors round the martyr'd dead,
As round an altar, lift their hearts to God.
Calm is that brow as when a host it braved,
And smiles that lip as on the land it saved!

XCVII.

Pardon, ye shrouded and mysterious Powers,
Ye far off shadows from the spirit-clime,
If for that realm untrodden by the Hours,
Awhile we leave this lazar house of Time;
With Song remounting to those native airs
Of which, tho' exil'd, still we are the heirs.

XCVIII.

Up from the clay and towards the Seraphim,
The Immortal, men call'd Caradoc, arose.
Round the freed captive whose melodious hymn
Had hail'd each glimmer earth, the dungeon, knows,
Spread all the aisles by angel worship trod;
Blazed every altar conscious of the God.

XCIX.

All the illumed creation one calm shrine;
All space one rapt adoring extacy;
All the sweet stars with their untroubled shine,
Near and more near enlarging thro' the sky;
All opening gradual on the eternal sight,
Joy after joy, the depths of their delight.

C.

Paused on the marge, Heaven's beautiful New-born,
Paused on the marge of that wide happiness;
And as a lark that, poised amid the morn,
Shakes from its wing the dew, — the plumes of bliss,
Sunned in the dawn of the diviner birth,
Shook every sorrow memory bore from earth:

CI.

Knowledge (that on the troubled waves of sense
Breaks into sparkles) — poured upon the soul
Its lambent, clear, translucent affluence,
And cold-eyed Reason loos'd its hard control;
Each godlike guess beheld the truth it sought;
And inspiration flash'd from what was thought.

CII.

Still'd evermore the old familiar train
That fill the frail Proscenium of our deeds,
The unquiet actors on that stage, the brain,
Which, in the spangles of their tinsell'd weeds,
Mime the true soul's majestic royalties,
And strut august in Wonder's credulous eyes; —

CIII.

Ambition, Envy, Pride, those false desires
For a true bourne which *is* — but not in life;
And human Passion that with meteor fires
Lures from the star it simulates; Wisdom's strife
With its own Angel, Faith; — that nurse of Grief,
Hope, crown'd with flowers, a blight in every leaf;

CIV.

All these are still — abandoned to the worm,
Their loud breath jars not on the calm above!
Only survived, as if the single germ
Of the new life's ambrosian being, — LOVE.
Ah, if the bud can give such bloom to Time,
What is the flower when in its native clime?

CV.

Love to the radiant Stranger left alone
Of all the vanish'd hosts of memory;
While broadening round, on splendour splendour shone,
To earth soft-pitying dropt the veiless eye,
And saw the shape, that love remembered still,
Couch'd mid the ruins on the moonlit hill.

CVI.

And, with the new-born vision, piercing all
Things past and future, view'd the fates ordain'd;
The fame achieved amidst the Coral Hall;
From war and winter Freedom's symbol gained,
What rests? — the spirit from its realm of bliss,
Shot, loving down, — the guide to Happiness!

CVII.

Pale to the Cymrian king the Shadow came,
Its glory left it as the earth it neared,
In livid likeness as its corpse the same,
Wan with its wounds the awful ghost appeared.
Life heard the voice of unembodied breath,
And Sleep stood trembling side by side with Death.

CVIII.

“Come,” said the voice, “Before the Iron Gate
Which hath no egress, waiting thee, behold
Under the shadow of the brows of Fate,
The childlike playmate with the locks of gold.”
Then rose the mortal following, and, before,
Moved the pale shape the angel's comrade wore.

CIX.

Where, in the centre of those ruins grey,
Immense with blind walls columnless, a tomb
For earlier kings, whose names had passed away,
Chill'd the chill moonlight with its mass of gloom;
Thro' doors ajar to every prying blast
By which to rot imperial dust had past,

CX.

The vision went, and went the living king;
Then strange and hard to human ear to tell
By language moulded but by thoughts that bring
Material images, what there befell!
The mortal entered Eld's dumb burial place,
And at the threshold, vanished time and space!

CXI.

Yea, the hard sense of time was from the mind
Rased and annihilate; — yea, space to eye
And soul was presenceless? What rest behind?
Thought and the Infinite! the eternal I,
And its true realm the Limitless, whose brink
Thought ever nears: What bounds us when we think?

CXII.

Yea, as the dupe in tales Arabian,
Dipp'd but his brow beneath the beaker's brim,
And in that instant all the life of man
From youth to age roll'd its slow years on him,
And while the foot stood motionless — the soul
Swept with deliberate wing from pole to pole,

CXIII.

So when the man the Grave's still portals pass'd,
Closed on the substances or cheats of earth,
The Immaterial for the things it glass'd,
Shaped a new vision from the matter's dearth:
Before the sight that saw not thro' the clay,
The undefined Immeasurable lay.

CXIV.

A realm not land, nor sea, nor earth, nor sky,
Like air impalpable, and yet not air; —
“Where am I led?” asked Life with hollow sigh.
“To Death, that dim phantasmal EVERY WHERE,”
Answered the Ghost. “Nature's circumfluent robe
Girding all life — the globule or the globe.”

CXV.

“Yet,” said the Mortal, “if indeed this breath
Profane the world that lies beyond the tomb;
Where is the Spirit-race that peoples death?
My soul surveys but unsubstantial gloom,
A void — a blank — where none preside or dwell,
Nor woe nor bliss is here, nor heaven nor hell.”

CXVI.

“And what is death? — a name for nothingness,”*
Replied the Dead; “the shadow of a shade;
Death can retain no spirit! — woe and bliss,
And heaven and hell, are for the living made;
An instant flits between life’s latest sigh
And life’s renewal; — that it is to die!

* The sublime idea of the nonentity of death, of the instantaneous transit of the soul from one phase and cycle of being to another, is earnestly insisted upon by the early Cymrian bards in terms which seem borrowed from some spiritual belief anterior to that which does in truth teach that the life of man once begun, has not only no end, but no pause — and, in the triumphal cry of the Christian, “O grave where is thy victory?” — annihilates death.

CXVII.

“From the brief Here to the eternal There,
We can but see the swift flash of the goal;
Less than the space between two waves of air,
The void between existence and a soul;
Wherefore look forth; and with calm sight endure
The vague, impalpable, inane Obscure:

CXVIII.

Lo, by the Iron Gate a giant cloud
From which emerge (the form itself unseen)
Vast adamantine brows sublimely bow'd
Over the dark, — relentlessly serene;
Thou canst not view the hand beneath the fold,
The work it weaveth none but God behold.

CXIX.

“Yet ever from this Nothingness of Death,
That hand shapes out the myriad pomps of life;
Receives the matter when resign'd the breath,
Calms into Law the Elemental strife,
On each still'd atom forms afresh bestows;
(No atom lost since first Creation rose.)

CXX.

“Thus seen, what men call Nature, thou surveyest,
But matter boundeth not the still one's power;
In every deed its presence thou displayest,
It prompts each impulse, guides each winged hour,
It spells the Valkyrs to their gory loom,
It calls the blessing from the bane they doom:

CXXI.

“It rides the steed, it saileth with the bark,
Wafts the first corn-seed to the herbless wild,
Alike directing thro' the doom of dark,
The age-long Nature and the new-born child;
Here the dread Power, yet loftier tasks await,
And NATURE, twofold, takes the name of FATE.

CXXII.

“Nature or Fate, Matter's material life,
Or to all spirit the spiritual guide,
Alike with one harmonious being rife,
Form but the whole which only names divide;
Fate's crushing power, or Nature's gentle skill,
Alike one Good — from one all loving Will.”

CXXIII.

While thus the Shade benign instructs the King,
Near the dark cloud the still brows bended o'er,
They come: A soft wind with continuous wing
Sighs thro' the gloom and trembles thro' the door,
"Hark to that air," the gentle phantom said,
"In each faint murmur flit unseen the dead, —

CXXIV.

"Pass thro' the gate, from life the life resume,
As the old impulse flies to heaven or hell."
While spoke the Ghost, stood forth amidst the gloom,
A lucent Image, crowned with asphodell,
The left hand bore a mirror crystal-bright,
A wand star-pointed glittered in the right.

CXXV.

"Dost thou not know me? — me, thy second soul?
Dost thou not know me, Arthur?" said the Voice;
"I who have led thee to each noble goal,
Mirror'd thy heart, and starward led thy choice?
To each thee wisdom won in Labour's school,
I lured thy footsteps to the forest pool,

CXXVI.

“Showed all the woes which wait inebriate power,
And woke the man from youth’s voluptuous dream;
Glass’d on the crystal — let each stainless hour
Obey the wand I lift unto the beam;
And at the last, when yonder gates expand,
Pass with thy Guardian Angel, hand in hand.”

CXXVII.

Spoke the sweet Splendour, and as music dies
Into the heart that hears, subsides away,
Then Arthur lifted his serenest eyes
Towards the pale Shade from the celestial day,
And said, “O thou in life beloved so well,
Dream I or wake? — As those last accents fell,

CXXVIII.

“So fears that, spite of thy mild words, dismay’d,
Fears not of death, but that which death conceals,
Vanish; — my soul that trembled at thy shade,
Yearns to the far light which the shade reveals,
And sees how human is the dismal error
That hideth God, when veiling death with terror.

CXXIX.

“Ev’n thus some infant, in the early spring,
Under the pale buds of the almond tree,
Shrinks from the wind that with an icy wing
Shakes showering down white flakes that seem to be
Winter’s wan sleet, — till the quick sunbeam shows
That those were blossoms which he took for snows.

CXXX.

“Thou to this last and sovran mystery
Of my mysterious travail guiding sent,
Dear as thou wert, I will not mourn for thee,
Thou wert not shaped for earth’s hard element —
Our ends, our aims, our pleasure, and our woe,
Thou knew’st them all, but thine we could not know.

CXXXI.

“Forgive that none were worthy of thy worth!
That none took heed, upon the plodding way,
What diamond dew was on the flowers of earth,
Till in thy soul drawn upward to the day.
But now, why gape the wounds upon thy breast?
What guilty hand dismissed thee to the blest?

CXXXII.

“For blest thou art, belov’d and lost? Oh, speak,
Say thou art with the Angels?” — As at night
Far off the pharos on the mountain peak
Sends o’er dim ocean one pale path of light,
Lost in the wideness of the weltering Sea,
So, that one gleam along eternity

CXXXIII.

Vouchsafed, the radiant guide (its mission closed)
Fled, and the mortal stood amidst the cloud!
All dark above, — lo at his feet reposed
Beneath the Brow’s still terror o’er it bow’d,
With eyes that lit the gloom thro’ which they smil’d,
A Virgin shape, half woman and half child!

CXXXIV.

There, bright before the iron gates of Death,
Bright in the shadow of the awful Power
Which did as Nature give the human breath,
As Fate mature the germ and nurse the flower
Of earth for heaven, — Toil’s last and sweetest prize,
The destined Soother lifts her fearless eyes!

CXXXV.

Thro' all the mortal's frame, enraptured thrills
A subtler tide, a life ambrosial,
Bright as the fabled element which fills
The veins of Gods when in the golden hall
Flush'd Hebe brims the urn. The transport broke
The charm that gave it — and the Dreamer woke.

CXXXVI.

Was it in truth a Dream? He gazed around,
And saw the granite of sepulchral walls;
Thro' open doors, along the desolate ground,
O'er coffin dust — the morning sunbeam falls;
On mouldering relics life its splendour flings,
The arms of warriors and the bones of kings. —

CXXXVII.

He stood within that Golgotha of old,
Whither the Phantom first had led the soul.
It was no dream! lo, round those locks of gold
Rest the young sunbeams like an auriole;
Lo, where the day, night's mystic promise keeps,
And in the tomb a life of beauty sleeps!

CXXXVIII.

Slow to his eyes, those lids reveal their own,
And, the lips smiling even in their sigh,
The Virgin woke! O never yet was known,
In bower or plaisaunce under summer sky,
Life so enrich'd with nature's happiest bloom
As thine, thou young Aurora of the tomb!

CXXXIX.

Words cannot paint thee, gentlest Cynosure
Of all things lovely in that loveliest form,
Souls wear — the youth of woman! brows as pure
As Memphian skies that never knew a storm;
Lips with such sweetness in their honied deeps
As fills the rose in which a fairy sleeps;

CXL.

Eyes on whose tenderest azure, aching hearts
Might look as to a heaven, and cease to grieve;
The very blush, as day, when it departs,
Haloes, in flushing, the mild cheek of eve,
Taking soft warmth in light from earth afar,
Heralds no thought less holy than a star.

CXLI.

And Arthur spoke! O ye, all noble souls,
Divine how knighthood speaks to maiden fear!
Yet, is it fear which that young heart controuls
And leaves its music voiceless on the ear —
Ye, who have felt what words can ne'er express,
Say then, is fear as still as happiness?

CXLII.

By the mute pathos of an eloquent sign,
Her rosy finger on her lip, the maid
Seem'd to denote that on that coral shrine
Speech was to silence vow'd. Then from the shade
Gliding — she stood beneath the golden skies,
Fair as the dawn that brightened Paradise.

CXLIII.

And Arthur looked, and saw the dove no more;
Yet, by some wild and wondrous glamoury,
Chang'd to the shape the new companion wore,
His soul the missing Angel seemed to see;
And, soft and silent as the earlier guide,
The soft eyes thrill, the silent footsteps glide.

CXLIV.

Thro' paths his yester steps had fail'd to find,
Adown the woodland slope she leads the king, —
And, pausing oft, she turns to look behind,
As oft had turned the dove upon the wing;
And oft he questioned, still to find reply
Mute on the lip, yet struggling to the eye.

CXLV.

Far briefer now the way, and open more
To heaven, than those his whileome steps had won;
And sudden', lo! his galley's brazen prore
Beams from the greenwood burnished in the sun;
Up from the sward his watchful cruisers spring,
And loud-lipp'd welcome girds with joy the King.

CXLVI.

Now plies the rapid oar, now swells the sail;
All day, and deep into the heart of night,
Flies the glad bark before the favouring gale;
Now Sabra's virgin waters dance in light
Under the large full moon, on margents green,
Lone with charr'd wrecks where Saxon fires have been.

CXLVII.

Here furls the sail, here rests awhile the oar,
And from the crews the Cymrians and the maid
Pass with mute breath upon the mournful shore;
For, where yon groves the gradual hillock shade,
A convent stood when Arthur left the land.
God grant the shrine hath 'scap'd the heathen's hand!

CXLVIII.

Landing, on lifeless hearths, thro' roofless walls
And casement gaps, the ghost-like star-beams peer;
Welcomed by night and ruin, hollow falls
The footstep of a King! — Upon the ear
The inexpressible hush of murder lay, —
Wide yawn'd the doors, and not a watch dog's bay!

CXLIX.

They pass the groves, they gain the holt, and lo!
Rests of the sacred pile but one grey tower,
A fort for luxury in the long-ago
Of gentile gods, and Rome's voluptuous power.
But far on walls yet spared, the moon-beams fell, —
Far on the golden domes of Carduel!

CL.

“Joy,” cried the King, “behold, the land lives still!”

Then Gawaine pointed, where in lengthening line
The Saxon watch-fires from the haunted hill

(Shorn of its forest old,) their blood-red shine
Fling over Isca, and with wrathful flush
Gild the vast storm-cloud of the armed hush.

CLI.

“Ay,” said the King, “in that lull’d Massacre

Doth no ghost whisper Crida — ‘Sleep no more!’

“Hark, where I stand, dark murder-chief, on thee

I launch the doom! ye airs, that wander o’er
Ruins and graveless bones, to Crida’s sleep
Bear Cymri’s promise, which her king shall keep!”

CLII.

As thus he spoke, upon his outstretch’d arm

A light touch trembled, — turning he beheld
The maiden of the tomb; a wild alarm

Shone from her eyes; his own their terror spell’d.
Struggling for speech, the pale lips writhed apart,
And, as she clung, he heard her beating heart;

CLIII.

While Arthur marvelling sooth'd the agony
Which, comprehending not, he still could share,
Sudden sprang Gawaine — hark! a timorous cry
Pierced yon dim shadows! Arthur look'd, and where
On artful valves revolved the stoney door,
A kneeling nun his knight is bending o'er.

CLIV.

Ere the nun's fears the knightly words dispell,
As towards the spot the maid and monarch came,
On Arthur's brow the slanted moon-beams fell,
And the nun knew the King, and call'd his name,
And clasp'd his knees, and sobb'd thro' joyous tears,
“Once more! once more! our God his people hears!”

CLV.

Kin to his blood — the welcome face of one
Known as a saint throughout the Christian land,
Arthur recall'd, and as a pious son
Honouring a mother — on that sacred hand
In homage bow'd the King, “What mercy saves
Thee, blest survivor in this shrine of graves?”

CLVI.

Then the nun led them, thro' the artful door
Mask'd in the masonry, adown a stair
That coil'd its windings to the grottoed floor
Of vaulted chambers desolately fair;
Wrought in the green hill like on Oread's home,
For summer heats by some soft lord of Rome,

CLVII.

On shells, which nymphs from silver sands might cull,
On paved mosaics, and long-silenced fount,
On marble waifs of the far Beautiful
By graceful spoiler garner'd from the mount
Of vocal Delphi, or the Elean town,
Or Sparta's rival of the violet-crown —

CLVIII.

Shone the rude cresset from the homely shrine
Of that new Power, upon whose Syrian Cross
Perished the antique Jove! And the grave sign
Of the glad faith (which, for the lovely loss
Of poet-gods, their own Olympus frees
To men! — our souls the new Uranides,)

CLIX.

High from the base, on which, of old, reposed
Grape-crown'd Iacchus — spoke the Saving Woe!
The place itself the sister's tale disclosed.
Here, while, amidst the hamlet doom'd below,
Raged the fierce Saxon — was retreat secured;
Nor gnawed the flame where those deep vaults immured.

CLX.

To peasants, scattered thro' the neighbouring plains,
The secret known; — kind hands with pious care
Supply such humble nurture as sustains
Lives most with fast familiar; thus and there
The patient sisters in their faith sublime,
Felt God was good, and waited for His time.

CLXI.

Yet ever when the crimes of earth and day
Slept in the starry peace, to the lone tower
The sainted abbess won her nightly way,
And gazed on Carduel! — 'T was the wonted hour
When from the opening door the Cymrian knight
Saw the pale shadow steal along the light.

CLXII.

Musing, the King the safe retreat surveyed,
And smoothed his brow from time's most anxious care;
Here — from the strife secure, might rest the maid
Not meet the tasks that morn must bring to share;
And pleased the sister's pitying looks he eyed
Bent on the young form creeping to her side.

CLXIII.

"King," said the sainted nun, "from some far clime
Comes this fair stranger, that her eyes alone
Answer our mountain tongue?" — "May happier time,
Replied the King, "her tale, her land, make known.
Meanwhile, O kind recluse, receive the guest
To whom these altars seem the native rest."

CLXIV.

The sister smiled, "In sooth those looks," she said,
"Do speak a soul pure with celestial air;
And in the morrow's awful hour of dread,
Her heart methinks will echo to our prayer,
And breathe responsive to the hymns that swell
The Christian's curse upon the infidel.

CLXV.

“But say, if truth from rumour vague and wild
To this still world the friendly peasants bring,
‘That grief and wrath for some lost heathen child,
Urge to yon walls the Mercian’s direful king?’” —
“Nay,” said the Cymrian, “doth ambition fail
When force needs falsehood, of the glozing tale?”

CLXVI.

“And — but behold she droops, she faints, outworn
By the long wandering and the scorch of day!”
Pale as a lily when the dewless morn,
Parch’d in the fiery dog-star, wanes away
Into the glare of noon without a cloud,
O’er the nun’s breast that flower of beauty bow’d.

CLXVII.

Yet still the clasp retained the hand that prest,
And breath came still, tho’ heav’d in sobbing sighs.
“Leave her,” the sister said, “to needful rest,
And to such care as woman best supplies;
And may this charge a conqueror soon recall,
And change the refuge to a monarch’s hall!”

CLXVIII.

Tho' found the asylum sought, with boding mind
The crowning guerdon of his mystic toil
To the kind nun the unwilling King resigned;
Nor till his step was on his mountain soil
Did his large heart its lion calm regain,
And o'er his soul no thought but Cymri reign.

CLXIX.

As towards the bark the friends resume their way,
Quick they resolve the conflict's hardy scheme;
With half the Northmen, at the break of day
Shall Gawaine sail where Sabra's broadening stream
Admits a reeded creek, and, landing there,
Elude the fleet the neighbouring waters bear;

CLXX.

Thro' secret paths with bush and bosk o'ergrown,
Wind round the tented hill, and win the wall;
With Arthur's name arouse the leaguered town,
Give the pent stream the cataract's rushing fall,
Sweep to the camp, and on the Pagan horde
Urge all of man that yet survives the sword.

CLXXI.

Meanwhile on foot the king shall guide his band
Round to the rearward of the vast array,
Where yet large fragments of the forest stand
To shroud with darkness the avenger's way;—
Thence, when least look'd for, burst upon the foe,
On war's own heart direct the sudden blow;

CLXXII.

Thus, front and rear assailed, their numbers, less
(Perplex'd, distraught,) avail the heathen's power.
Dire was the peril, and the sole success
In the nice seizure of the season'd hour;
The high-soul'd rashness of the bold emprise;
The fear that smites the fiercest in surprize;

CLXXIII.

Whatever worth the enchanted boons may bear,
The hero heart by which those boons were won;
The stubborn strength of that supreme despair,
When victory lost is all a land undone;
In the man's cause, and in the Christian's zeal,
And the just God that sanctions Freedom's steel.

CLXXIV.

Meanwhile, along a cavelike corridor
The stranger guest the gentle abbess led;
Where the voluptuous hypocaut of yore
Left cells for vestal dreams saint-hallowèd.
Her own, austere rude, affords the rest
To which her parting kiss consigns the guest.

CLXXV.

But welcome not for rest that loneliness!
The iron lamp the imaged cross displays,
And to that guide for souls, what mute distress
Lifts the imploring passion of its gaze?
Fear like remorse — and sorrow dark as sin?
Enter that mystic heart and look within!

CLXXVI.

What broken gleams of memory come and go
Along the dark! — a silent starry love
Lighting young Fancy's virgin waves below,
But shed from thoughts that rest ensphered above!
Oh, flowers whose bloom had perfumed Carmel, weave
Wreaths for such love as lived in Genevieve!

CLXXVII.

A May noon resteth on the forest hill;
A May noon resteth over ruins hoar;
A maiden muses on the forest hill,
A tomb's vast pile o'er shades the ruins hoar,
With doors now open to each prying blast,
Where once to rot imperial dust had past;

CLXXVIII.

Glides thro' that tomb of Eld the musing maid,
And slumber drags her down its airy deep.
O wondrous trance! in druid robes array'd,
What form benignant charms the life-like sleep?
What spells low-chaunted, holy-sweet, like prayer,—
Plume the light soul, and waft it through the air?

CLXXIX.

Comes a dim sense as of an angel's being,
Bath'd in ambrosial dew and liquid day;
Of floating wings, like heavenward instincts, freeing
Thro' azure solitudes a spirit's way, —
An absence of all earthly thought, desire,
Aim — hope, — save those which love and which aspire;

CLXXX.

Each harder sense of the mere human mind
Merged into some protective prescience;
Calm gladness, conscious of a charge consign'd
To the pure ward of guardian innocence;
And the felt presence, in that charge, of one
Whose smile to life is as to flowers the sun.

CLXXXI.

Go on, thou troubled Memory, wander on!
Dull, o'er the bounds of the departing trance,
Droops the lithe wing the airier life hath known;
Yet on the confines of the dream, the glance
Sees — where before he stood, the Enchanter stand, —
Bend the vast brow, and stretch the shadowy hand.

CLXXXII.

And, human sense reviving, on the ear
Fall words ambiguous, now with happy hours
And plighted love, — and now with threats austere
Of demon dangers — of malignant Powers
Whose force might yet the counter charm unbind,
If loosed the silence to her lips enjoin'd. —

CLXXXIII.

Then, as that Image faded from the verge
Of life's renewed horizon — came the day;
Yet, ere the vision's last faint gleams submerge
Into earth's common light, their parting ray
On Arthur's brow the faithful memories leave,
And the Dove's heart still beats in Genevieve!

CLXXXIV.

Still she the presence feels, — resumes the guide,
Till slowly, slowly waned the prescient power
That gave the guardian to the pilgrim's side; —
And only rested, with her human dower
Of gifts sublime to soothe, but weak to save,
And blind to warn, — the Daughter of the Grave.

CLXXXV.

Yet the lost dream bequeathed for ever more
Thoughts that did, like a second nature, make
Life to that life the Dove had hover'd o'er
Cling as an instinct, — and for that dear sake
Danger and Death had found the woman's love
In realms as near the Angels as the Dove.

CLXXXVI.

And now and now is she herself the one
To launch the bolt on that beloved life?
Shuddering she starts, again she hears the nun
Denounce the curse that arms the awful strife;
Again her lips the wild cry stifle, — “See
Crida’s lost child, thy country’s curse, in me!”

CLXXXVII.

Or — if along the world of that despair
Fleet other spectres, — from the ruined steep
Points the dread arm, and hisses thro’ the air
The avenger’s sentence on the father’s sleep!
The dead seem rising from the yawning floor,
And the shrine steams as with a shamble’s gore.

CLXXXVIII.

Sudden she springs, and, from her veiling hands,
Lifts the pale courage of her calmèd brow;
With upward eyes, and murmuring lips, she stands,
Raising to heaven the new-born hope: — and now
Glides from the cell along the galleried caves,
Mute as a moonbeam flitting over waves.

CLXXXIX.

Now gained the central grot; now won the stair; .

The lamp she bore gleamed on the door of stone;

Why halt? what hand detains? — she turn'd, and there,

On the nun's serge and brow rebuking, shone

The tremulous light; then fear her lips unchain'd

From that stern silence by the Dream ordain'd,

RING ARTHUR.

CXC.

And at those holy feet the Saxon fell

Sobbing, "O stay me not! O rather free

These steps that fly to save *his* Carduel!

Throne, altars, life — his life! In me, in me,

To these strange shrines, thy saints in mercy bring

Crida's lost Child! — Way, way to save thy king!"

CXCI.

Listened the nun; doubt, joy, and awed amaze

Fused in that lambent atmosphere of soul,

FAITH in the wise All Good! — so melt the rays

Of varying Iris in the lucid whole

Of light; — "Thy people still to Thee are dear,

O Lord," she murmured, "and Thy hand is here!"

CXCII.

“Yes,” cried the suppliant, “if my loss deplored,
My fate unguest — misled and arm’d my sire;
When to his heart his child shall be restored,
Sure, war itself will in the cause expire!
Ruth come with joy, — and in that happy hour
Hate drop the steel, and Love alone have power?”

CXCIII.

Then the nun took the Saxon to her breast,
Round the bow’d neck she hung her sainted cross,
And said, “Go forth — O beautiful and blest!
And if my king rebuke me for thy loss,
Be my reply the gain that loss bestow’d, —
Hearths for his people, altars for his God!”

CXCIV.

She ceased; — on secret valves revolved the door;
Breathed on the silent hill the dawning air;
One moment paused the steps of Hope, and o’er
The war’s vast slumber looked the Soul of Prayer.
So halts the bird that from the cage hath flown; —
A light bough rustled, and the Dove was gone.

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK XII.

ARGUMENT.

Preliminary Stanzas — Scene returns to Carduel — a day has passed since the retreat of the Saxons into their encampment — The Cymrians take advantage of the enemy's inactivity, to introduce supplies into the famished city — Watch all that day, and far into the following night, is kept round the corpse of Caradoc — Before dawn, the burial takes place — The Prophet by the grave of the Bard — Merlin's address to the Cymrians, whom he dismisses to the walls, in announcing the renewed assault of the Saxons — Merlin then demands a sacrifice from Lancelot — gives commissions to the two sons of Faul the Aleman, and takes Faul himself (to whom an especial charge is destined) to the city — The scene changes to the Temple Fortress of the Saxons — The superstitious panic of the heathen hosts at their late defeat — The magic divinations of the Runic priests — The magnetic trance of the chosen Soothsayer — The Oracle he utters — He demands the blood of a Christian maid — The pause of the priests and the pagan king — The abrupt entrance of Genevieve — Crida's joy — The priests demand the Victim — Genevieve's Christian faith is evinced by the Cross which the Nun had hung round her neck — Crida's reply to the priests — They dismiss one of their number to inflame the army, and so insure the sacrifice — The priests lead the Victim to the Altar, and begin their hymn, as the Soothsayer wakes from his trance — The interruption and the compact — Crida goes from the Temple to the summit of the tower without — The invading march of the Saxon troops under Harold described — The light from the Dragon Keep — The Saxons scale the walls, and disappear within the town — The irruption of flames from the fleet — The dismay of that part of the army that had remained in the camp — The flames are seen by the rest of the heathen army in the streets of Carduel — The approach of the Northmen under Gawaine — The light on the Dragon Keep changes its hue into blood-red, and the Prophet appears on the height of the tower — The retreat of the Saxons from the city — The joy of the Chief Priest — The time demanded by the compact has expired — He summons Crida to complete the sacrifice — Crida's answer — The Priest rushes back into the Temple — The offering is bound to the Altar — Faul! the gleam of the enchanted glaive — The appearance of Arthur — The War takes its last stand within the heathen temple — Crida and the Teuton kings — Arthur meets Crida hand to hand — Meanwhile Harold saves the Gonfanon, and follows the bands under his lead to the river side — He addresses them, re-forms their ranks, and leads them to the brow of the hill — His embassy to Arthur — The various groups in the heathen temple described — Harold's speech — Arthur's reply — Merlin's prophetic address to the chiefs of the two races — The End.

BOOK XII.

I.

Flow on, flow on, fair Fable's happy stream,
Vocal for aye with Eld's first music-chaunt,
Where, mirror'd far adown the chrystal, gleam
The golden domes of Carduel and Romaunt;
Still one last look on knighthood's peerless ring,
Of moonèd dream-land and the Dragon King! —

II.

Detain me yet amid the lovely throng,
Hold yet thy Sabbat, thou melodious spell!
Still to the circle of enchanted song
Charm the high Mage of Druid parable,
The Fairy, bard-led from her Caspian Sea,
And Genius,* lured from caves in Araby!

* Whether or not the fairy of Great Britain and Ireland be of Celtic or Pictish origin, in the rude shape it assumes in the simplest legends; — as soon as it appears in the romance of that later period in which Arthur was the popular hero, it betrays unequivocal evidence of its identity with the Persian Peri. The Genius is still more obviously the creation of the East.

III.

Tho' me, less fair if less familiar ways,
Sought in the paths by earlier steps untrod,
Allure — yet ever, in the marvel-maze,
The flowers afar perfume the virgin sod;
The simplest leaf in fairy gardens cull,
And round thee opens all the Beautiful!

IV.

Alas! the sunsets of our Northern main
Soon lose the tints Hesperian Fancy weaves;
Soon the sweet river feels the icy chain,
And haunted forests shed their murmurous leaves;
The bough must wither, and the bird depart,
And winter clasp the world — as life the heart!

V.

A day had pass'd since first the Saxons fled
Before the Christian, and their war lay still;
From morn to eve the Cymrian riders spread
Where flocks yet graze on some remoter hill,
Pale, on the walls, fast-sinking Famine waits,
When hark, the droves come lowing thro' the gates!

VI.

Yet still, the corpse of Caradoc around,
All day, and far into the watch of night,
The grateful victors guard the sacred ground;
But in that hour when all his race of light
Leave Eos lone in heaven, — earth's hollow breast
Oped to the dawn-star and the singer's rest.

VII

Now, ere they lowered the corpse, with noiseless tread
Still as a sudden shadow, Merlin came
Thro' the arm'd crowd; and paus'd before the dead,
And, looking on the face, thrice call'd the name.
Then, hush'd, thro' all an awed compassion ran,
And all gave way to the old quiet man.

VIII.

For Cymri knew that of her children none
Had, like the singer, loved the lonely sage;
All felt, that there a father call'd a son
Out from that dreariest void, — bereavèd age;
Forgot the dread renown, the mystic art,
And saw but sacred there — the human heart!

IX.

And thrice the old man kiss'd the lips that smil'd,

And thrice he call'd the name, — then to the grave,
Hush'd as the nurse that bears a sleeping child

To its still mother's breast, — the form he gave:
With tender hand composed the solemn rest,
And laid the harp upon the silent breast.

X.

And then he sate him down, a little space

From the dark couch, and so, of none took heed;
But lifting to the twilight skies his face,

That secret soul which never man could read,
Far as the soul it miss'd, from human breath,
Rose — where Thought rises when it follows Death!

XI.

And swells and falls in gusts the funeral dirge

As hollow falls the mould, or swells the mound;
And (Cymri's warlike wont) upon the verge,

The orb'd shields are placed in rows around;
Now o'er the dead, grass waves; — the rite is done;
And a new grave shall greet a rising sun.

XII.

Then slowly turned, and calmly moved the sage,
On the Bard's grave his stand the Prophet took.
High o'er the crowd in all his pomp of age
August, a glory brightened from his look;
Hope flashed in eyes illumined from his own,
Bright, as if there some sure redemption shone.

XIII.

Thus spoke the Seer: "Hosannah to the brave;
Lo, the eternal heir-looms of your land!
A realm's great treasure house! The freeman's grave;
The hero's creed that to the swordless hand
Thought, when heroic, gives an army's might; —
And song to nations as to plants the light!

XIV.

"Cymrians, the sun yon towers will scarcely gild,
Ere war will scale them! Here, your task is o'er.
Your walls your camp, your streets your battle-field;
Each house a fortress! — One strong effort more
For God, for Freedom — for your shrines and homes!
After the Martyr the Deliverer comes!"

XV.

He ceased; and such the reverence of the crowd,
No lip presumed to question. Wonder hushed
Its curious guess, and only Hope aloud
Spoke in the dauntless shout: each cheek was flushed;
Each eye was bright; — each heart beat high; and all
Ranged in due ranks, resought the shatter'd wall:

XVI.

Save only four, whom to that holy spot
The Prophet's whisper stay'd: — of these, the one
Of knightly port and arms, was Lancelot;
But in the ruder three, with garments won
From the wild beast, — long hair'd, large limb'd, agen
See Rhine's strong sons, the convert Alemen!

XVII.

When these alone remained beside the mound,
The Prophet drew apart the Paladin,
And said, "what time, feud, worse than famine, found
The Cymrian race, like some lost child of sin
That courts, yet cowers from death; — serene thro' all
The jarring factions of the maddening hall,

XVIII.

“Thou didst in vain breathe high rebuke to pride,
With words sublimely proud. ‘No post the man
Ennobles; — man the post! did He who died
To crown in death the end His birth began,
Assume the sceptre when the cross He braved?
Did He wear purple in the world He saved?”

XIX.

““Ye clamour which is worthiest of command, —
Place me, whose fathers led the hosts of Gaul,
Amongst the meanest children of your land;
Let me owe nothing to my fathers, — all
To such high deeds as raised, ere kings were known,
The boldest savage to the earliest throne!”

XX.

“But none did heed thee, and in scornful grief
Went thy still footsteps from the raging hall,
Where by the altars of the bright Belief
That spans this cloud-world when its sun-showers fall,
She, thine in heaven at least assured to be,
Pray’d not for safety but for death with thee.

XXI.

“There, by the altar, did ye join your hands,
And in your vow, scorning malignant Time,
Ye plighted two immortals! in those bands
Hope still wove flowers, — but earth was not their clime;
Then to the breach alone, resigned, consol’d,
Went Gaul’s young hero. — Art thou now less bold?

XXII.

“Thy smile replies! Know, while we speak, the King
Is on the march; each moment that delays
The foeman, speeds the conqueror on its wing;
If, till the hour is ripe, the Saxon stays
His rush, then idly wastes it on our wall,
Not ours the homes that burn, the shrines that fall!

XXIII.

“But that delay vouchsafed not — comes in vain
The bright achiever of enchanted powers;
He comes a king, — no people but the slain,
And round his throne will crash his blazing towers,
This is not all; for him, the morn is rife
With one dire curse that threatens more than life; —

XXIV.

“A curse which, launched, will wither every leaf

In victory's crown, chill youth itself to age!

Here magic fails — for over love and grief

There is no glamour in the brazen page.

Born of the mind, o'er mind extends mine art; —

Beyond its circle beats the human heart! —

XXV.

“Delay the hour — save Carduel for thy king;

Avert the curse; from misery save thy brother!”

“Thrice welcome Death,” cried Lancelot, “could it bring

The bliss to bless mine Arthur! As the mother

Lives in her child, the planet in the sky,

Thought in the soul, in Arthur so live I.”

XXVI.

“Prepare,” the Seer replied, “be firm! — and yield

The maid thou lovest to her Saxon sire.”

Like a man lightning-stricken, Lancelot reel'd,

And as if blinded by the intolerant fire,

Covered his face with his convulsive hand,

And groaned aloud, “What woe dost thou demand?”

XXVII.

“Yield her! and wherefore? Cruel as thou art!

Can Cymri's king or Carduel's destiny
Need the lone offering of a loving heart,

Nothing to kings and states, but all to me?”

“Son,” said the prophet, “can the human eye
Trace by what wave light quivers from the sky;

XXVIII.

“Explore some thought whose utterance shakes the earth

Along the airy galleries of the brain;

Or can the human judgment gauge the worth

Of the least link in Fate's harmonious chain?

All doubt is cowardice — all trust is brave —

Doubt, and desert thy king; — believe and save.”

XXIX.

Then Lancelot fix'd his keen eyes on the sage,

And said, “Am I the sacrifice, or she?

Risks she no danger from the heathen's rage,

She the new Christian?” — “Danger more with thee!

Will blazing roofs and trampled altars yield

A shelter surer than her father's shield?

XXX.

“If mortal schemes may foil the threatening hour,
Thy heart’s reward shall crown thine honour’s test;
And the same fates that crush the heathen power
Restore the Christian to the conqueror’s breast;
Yea, the same lights that gild the nuptial shrine
Of Arthur, shed a beam as blest on thine!”

XXXI.

“I trust and I submit,” said Lancelot,
With pale firm lip. “Go thou — I dare not — I!
Say, if I yield, that I abandon not!
Her form may leave a desert to my eye,
But here — but *here!*” — No more his lips could say,
He smote his bleeding heart, and went his way!

XXXII.

The Enchanter, thoughtful, turned, and on the grave
His look relaxing fell. — “Ah, child, lost child!
To thy young life no youth harmonious gave
Music; — no love thine exquisite griefs beguil’d;
Thy soul’s deep ocean hid its priceless pearl; —
And *he* is loved, and yet repines! O churl!”

XXXIII.

And murmuring thus, he saw below the mound
The stoic brows of the stern Aleman,
Their gaunt limbs strewn supine along the ground,
Still as gorg'd lions couch'd before the den
After the feast; their life no medium knows,
Here, headlong conflict, there, inert repose!

XXXIV.

"Which of these feet could overtake the roe?
Which of these arms could grapple with the bear?"
"My first-born," answered Faul, "outstrips the roe;
My youngest crushes in his grasp the bear."
"Thou, then, the swift one, gird thy loins, and rise;
See o'er the lowland where the vapour lies,

XXXV.

"Far to the right, a mist from Sabra's wave;
Amidst that haze explore a creek rush-grown,
Screen'd from the waters less remote, which lave
The Saxon's anchor'd barks, and near a lone
Grey crag where bitterns boom; within that creek
Gleams thro' green boughs a galley's brazen peak;

XXXVI.

“This gain’d, demand the chief, a Christian knight,
The bear’s rough mantle o’er his rusted mail;
Tell him from me, to tarry till a light
Burst from the Dragon keep; — then crowd his sail,
Fire his own ship — and, blazing to the bay,
Cleave thro’ yon fleet his red destroying way;

XXXVII.

“No arduous feat: the gallies are unmann’d,
Moor’d each to each; let fire consume them all!
Then, the shore won, lead hitherwards the band
Between the Saxon camp and Cymrian wall.
What next behoves, the time itself will show,
Here counsel ceases; — there, ye find the foe!”

XXXVIII.

Heard the wild youth, and no reply made he,
But braced his belt and grip’d his spear, and straight
As the bird flies, he flew. “My son, to thee,”
Next said the Prophet, “a more urgent fate
And a more perilous duty are consign’d;
Mark, the strong arm requires the watchful mind.

XXXIX.

“Thou hast to pass the Saxon sentinels;
Thou hast to thread the Saxon hosts alone;
Many are there whom thy far Rhine expels
His swarming war-hive, — and their tongue thine own;
Take from yon Teuton dead the mail'd disguise,
Thy speech their ears, thy garb shall dupe their eyes;

XL.

“The watch-pass ‘Vingólf’* wins thee thro’ the van,
The rest shall danger to thy sense inspire,
And that quick light in the hard sloth of man
Coil’d, till sharp need strike forth the sudden fire.
The encampment traversed, where the woods behind
Slope their green gloom, thy stealthy pathway wind;

XLI.

“Keep to one leftward track, amidst the chase
Clear’d for the hunter’s sport in happier days;
Till scarce a mile from the last tent, a space
Clasping grey crommell stones, will close the maze.
There, in the centre of that Druid ring,
Arm’d men will stand around the Cymrian King: —

* Vingólf. Literally, “The Abode of Friends;” the name for the place in which the heavenly goddesses assemble.

XLII.

“Tell him to set upon the tallest pine
Keen watch, and wait, until from Carduel’s tower,
High o’er the wood, a starry light shall shine;
Not *that* the signal, tho’ it nears the hour,
But when the light shall change its hues, and form
One orb blood-dyed, as sunsets red with storm;

XLIII.

“Then, while the foe their camp unguarded leave,
And round our walls their tides tempestuous roll,
To yon wood pile, the Saxon fortress, cleave;
Be Odin’s Idol the Deliverer’s goal.
Say to the King, ‘In that funereal fane
Complete thy mission, and thy guide regain!’”

XLIV.

While spoke the seer, the Teuton’s garb of mail
The son of Faul had donn’d, and bending now,
He kiss’d his father’s cheek. — “And if I fail,”
He murmured, “leave thy blessing on my brow,
My father!” Then the convert of the wild
Look’d up to Heaven, and mutely bless’d his child.

XLV.

“Thou wend with me, proud sire of dauntless men,”

Resumed the seer: — “On thine arm let my age
Lean, as shall thine upon *their* children!” — Then

The loreless savage — the all-gifted sage,
By the strong bonds of will and heart allied;
Went towards the towers of Carduel, side by side.

XLVI.

To Crida's camp the swift song rushing flies;

Round Odin's* shrine wild Priests, rune-muttering,
Task the weird omens hateful to the skies;

Pale by the idol stands the grey-hair'd king;
And, from without, the unquiet armament
Booms, in hoarse surge, its chafing discontent.

* As throughout this twelfth book, Odin representing more than the mere Woden of the Saxons, assumes the general character of the great War God of the universal Teuton Family, and as it would be here both perplexing and pedantic to mark the faint distinctions between the two; so in this portion of the work, whether in narrative, or in the dialogue of the Saxons, the former appellation of the Deity of the North (Odin) will be uniformly preserved.

XLVII.

For in defeat (when first that multitude
Shrunk from a foe, and fled the Cymrian sword,)
The pride of man the wrath of gods had viewed;
Religious horror smote the palsied horde;
The field refused, till priest, and seid, and charm,
Explore the offence, and wrath divine disarm.

XLVIII.

All day, all night, glared fires, dark-red and dull
With mystic gums, before the Teuton god,
And waved o'er runes which Mimer's trunkless skull
Had whisper'd Odin — the Diviner's rod;
And rank with herbs which baleful odours breathed,
The bubbling hell juice in the caldron seethed.

XLIX.

Now towards that hour when into coverts dank
Slinks back the wolf; when to her callow brood
Veers, thro' still boughs, the owl; when from the bank
The glow-worm wanes; when heaviest droops the wood,
Ere the faint twitter of the earliest lark, —
Ere dawn creeps chill and timorous thro' the dark;

L.

About that hour, of all the dreariest,

A flame leaps up from the dull fire's repose,
And shoots weird sparks along the runes, imprest
On stone and elm-bark, ranged in ninefold rows;
The vine's deep flush the purpling seid assumes,
And the strong venom coils in maddening fumes.

LI.

Pale grew the elect Diviner's altered brows;

Swell'd the large veins, and writhed the foaming lips;
And as some swart and fateful planet glows
Athwart the disk to which it brings eclipse;
So that strange Pythian madness whose control
Seems half to light and half efface the soul,

LII.

Broke from the horror of his glaring look;

His breath that died in hollow gusts away;
Seized by the grasp of unseen tempests, shook
To its rack'd base the spirit-house of clay;
Till the dark Power made firm the crushing spell;
And from the man burst forth the voice of hell.

LIII.

“The god — the god! lo, on his throne he reels!

Under his knit brows glow his wrathful eyes!

At his dread feet a spectral Valkyr kneels,

And shrouds her face! And cloud is in the skies,

And neither sun nor star, nor day nor night,

But in the cloud a steadfast Cross of Light!

LIV.

“The god — the god! hide, hide me from his gaze!

Its awful anger burns into the brain!

Spare me, O spare me! Speak, thy child obeys!

What rites appease thee, Father of the Slain?*

What direful omen do these signs foreshow?

What victim ask'st thou? Speak; the blood shall flow!”

LV.

Sunk the Possest One — writhing with wild throes;

And one appalling silence dusk'd the place,

As with a demon's wing. Anon, arose,

Calm as a ghost, the soothsayer: form and face

Rigid with iron sleep; and hollow fell

From stonelike lips the hateful oracle.

* Father of the Slain, Valfader. — Odin.

LVI.

“A cloud where Norna’s nurse the thunder lowers;
A curse is cleaving to the Teuton race;
Before the Cross the stricken Valkyr cowers;
The Herr-god trembles on his column’d base;
A virgin’s loss aroused the Teuton strife;
A virgin’s love hath charm’d the Avenger’s life;

LVII.

“A virgin’s blood alone averts the doom;
Revives the Valkyr, and preserves the god.
Whet the quick steel — she comes, she comes, for whom
The runes glow’d blood-red to the soothsayer’s rod!
O king, whose wrath the Odin-born array’d,
Regain the lost, and yield the Christian maid!”

LVIII.

As if that voice had quicken’d some dead thing
To give it utterance, so, when ceased the sound,
The dull eye fix’d, and the faint shuddering
Stirr’d all the frame; then sudden on the ground
Fell heavily the lumpish inert clay,
From which the demon noiseless rush’d away.

LIX.

Then the grey priests and the grey king creep near
The corpselike man; and sit them mutely down
In the still fire's red vaporous atmosphere;
The bubbling caldron sings and simmers on;
And thro' the reeks that from the poison rise,
Looks the wolf's blood-lust from those cruel eyes.

LX.

So sat they, musing fell; — when hark, a shout
Rang loud from rank to rank, re-echoing deep;
Hark to the tramp of multitudes without!
Near and more near the thickening tumults sweep;
King Crida wrathful rose; “what steps profane
Thy secret thresholds, Father of the Slain?”

LXI.

Frowning he strode along the lurid floors,
And loud, and loud the invading footsteps ring;
His hand impetuous flings apart the doors: —
“Who dare insult the god, and brave the king?”
Swift thro' the throng a bright-hair'd vision came;
Those stern lips falter with a daughter's name!

LXII.

Those hands uplifted, or to curse or smite,
Fold o'er a daughter's head their tremulous joy!
Oh, to the natural worship of delight,
How came the monstrous dogma — to destroy!
Sure, Heaven foreshow'd its gospel to the wild
In earth's first bond — the father and the child!

LXIII.

While words yet fail'd the bliss of that embrace,
The muttering priests, unmoved, each other eyed;
Then to the threshold came their measur'd pace: —
“Depart, Profane,” their Pagan pontiff cried,
“Depart, Profane, too near your steps have trod
To altars darkened with an angry God.

LXIV.

“Dire are the omens! Skulda rides the clouds,
Her sisters tremble* at the Urdar spring;
The hour demands us — shun the veil that shrouds
The Priests, the God, the Victim, and the King.”
Shuddering, the crowds retreat, and whispering low,
Spread the contagious terrors where they go.

* “Her sisters tremble,” &c., that is, the other two Fates (the Present and the Past) tremble at the Well of Life.

LXV.

Then the stern Elders came to Crida's side,
And from their lock'd embrace unclasp'd his hands:
"Lo," said their chieftain, "how the gods provide
Themselves the offering which the shrine demands!
By Odin's son be Odin's voice obey'd;
The lost is found — behold, and yield the maid!"

LXVI.

As when some hermit saint, in the old day
Of the soul's giant war with Solitude,
From some bright dream which rapt his life away
Amidst the spheres — unclosed his eyes, and view'd,
'Twixt sleep and waking, vaguely horrible,
The grausame tempter of the gothic hell;

LXVII.

So, on the father's bliss abruptly broke
The dreadful memory of his dismal god;
And his eyes pleading ere his terrors spoke,
Look'd round the brows of that foul brotherhood.
Then his big voice came weak and strangely mild,
"What mean those words? — why glare ye on my child?"

LXVIII.

“Do ye not know her? Elders, she is mine, —
My flesh, my blood, mine age’s youngest-born!
Why are ye mute? Why point to yonder shrine?
Ay,” — and here haughty with the joy of scorn
He raised his front. — “Ay, *be* the voice obeyed!
Priests, ye forget, — it was a *Christian* maid!”

LXIX.

He ceased, and laugh’d aloud, as humbled fell
Those greedy looks, and mutteringly replied
Faint voices, “True, so said the Oracle!”
When the arch Elder, with an eager stride
Reach’d child and sire, and cried, “See Crida, there,
On the maid’s breast the cross that Christians wear!”

LXX.

Those looks, those voices, thrill’d thro’ Genevieve,
With fears as yet vague, shapeless, undefin’d;
“Father,” she murmured, “Father, let us leave
These dismal precincts; how those eyes unkind
Freeze to my soul; sweet father, let us go;
My heart to thine would speak! why frown’st thou so?”

LXXI.

“Tear from thy breast that sign, unhappy one!

Sign to thy country's wrathful gods accurst!

Back, priests of Odin, I am Odin's son,

And she my daughter; in my war shield nurst,

Reared at your altars! Trample down the sign,

O child, and say — the Saxon's God is mine!”

LXXII.

Infant, who came to bid a war relent,

And rob ambition of its carnage-prize,

Is it on thee those sombre brows are bent?

For thee the death-greed in those ravening eyes?

Thy task undone, thy gentle prayer unspoken?

Ay, press the cross: it is the martyr's token!

LXXIII.

She press'd the cross with one firm faithful hand,

While one — (*that* trembled!) — clasp'd her father's knees;

As clings a wretch, that sinks in sight of land,

To reeds swept with him down the weltering seas,

And murmured, “Pardon; Him whose agony

Was earth's salvation, I may not deny!

LXXIV.

“Him who gave God the name I give to thee,
‘FATHER,’ — in Him, in Christ, is my belief!”
Then Crida turned unto the priests, — “Ye see,”
Smiling, he said, “that I have done with grief:
Behold the victim! be the God obey’d!
The son of Odin dooms the Christian maid!”

LXXV.

He said, and from his robe he wrench’d the hand,
And, where the gloom was darkest, stalk’d away.
But whispering low, still pause the hellish band;
And dread lest Nature yet redeem the prey,
And deem it wise against such chance to arm
The priesthood’s puissance with the host’s alarm;

LXXVI.

To bruit abroad the dark oracular threats,
From which the Virgin’s blood alone can save;
Gird with infuriate fears the murderous nets,
And plant an army to secure a grave;
The whispers cease — the doors one gleam of day
Give — and then close; — the blood hound slinks away.

LXXVII.

Around the victim — where, with wandering hand,
Tho' her blind tears, she seems to search thro' space,
For him who had forsaken, — circling stand
The solemn butchers; calm in every face
And death in every heart; till from the belt
Stretched one lean hand and grasp'd her where she knelt.

LXXVIII.

And her wild shriek went forth and smote the shrine,
Which echoed, shrilling back the sharp despair,
Thro' the waste gaps between the shafts of pine
To th' unseen father's ear. Before the glare
Of the weird fire, the sacrifice they chain
To stones impress'd with rune and shamble-stain.

LXXIX.

Then wait (for so their formal rites compel)
Till from the trance that still his senses seals,
Awakes the soothsayer of the oracle;
At length with tortured spasms, and slowly, steals
Back the reluctant life — slow as it creeps
To one hard-rescued from the drowning deeps.

LXXX.

And when from dim, uncertain, swimming eyes
The gaunt long fingers put the shaggy hair,
And on the priests, the shrine, the sacrifice,
Dwelt the fixed sternness of the glassy stare,
Before the god they led the demon-man,
And, circling round the two, their hymn began.

LXXXI.

So rapt in their remorseless ecstasy,
They did not hear the quick steps at the door,
Nor that loud knock, nor that impatient cry;
Till shook, — till crash'd, the portals on the floor, —
Crash'd to the strong hand of the fiery thane;
And Harold's stride came clanging up the fane. —

LXXXII.

But from his side bounded a shape as light
As forms that glide thro' Elfheim's limber air;
Swift to the shrine — where on those robes of white
The gloomy hell fires scowled their sullen glare,
Thro' the death-chaunting choir, — she sprang, — she prest,
And bowed her head upon the victim's breast;

LXXXIII.

And cried, "With thee, with thee, to live or die,
With thee, my Genevieve!" the Elders raised
Their hands in wrath, when from as stern an eye
And brow erect as theirs, they shrunk amazed —
And Harold spoke, "Ye priests of Odin, hear!
Your gods are mine, their voices I revere.

LXXXIV.

"Voices in winds, in groves, in hollow caves,
Oracular dream, or runic galdra sought;
But ages ere from Don's ancestral waves
Such wizard signs the Scythian Odin brought,
A voice that needs no priesthood's sacred art,
Some earlier God placed in the human heart.

LXXXV.

"I bow to charms that doom embattled walls;
To dreams revealing no unworthy foe;
A warrior's god in Glory's clarion calls;
Where war-steeds snort, and hurtling standards flow;
But when weak women for strong men must die,
My Man's proud nature gives your Gods the lie!

LXXXVI.

“If, — not yon seer by fumes and dreams beguil’d,

But, Odin’s self stood where his image stands,
Against the god I would protect my child!

Ha, Crida! — come! — *thy* child in chains! — those hands
Lifted to smite! — and thou, whose kingly bann
Arms nations, — wake, O statue, into man!”

LXXXVII.

For from his lair, and to his liegeman’s side

Had Crida listening strode: When ceased the Thane,
His voice, compest and tremulous, replied, —

“The life thou plead’st for doth these shrines profane,
In Odin’s son a father lives no more;
Yon maid adores the God our foes adore.”

LXXXVIII.

“And I — and I, stern king!” — Genevra cries,

“Her God is mine, and if that faith is crime,
Be just — and take a twofold sacrifice!”

“Cease,” cried the Thane, — “is this, ye Powers, a time
For kings and chiefs to lean on idle blades, —
Our leaders dreamers, and our victims maids?”

LXXXIX.

“Be varying gods by varying tribes addrest,
I scorn no gods that worthy foes adore;
Brave was the arm that humbled Harold’s crest,
And large the heart that did his child restore.
To all the valiant, Gladsheim’s Halls unclose;*
In Heaven the comrades were on Earth the foes.(1)

XC.

“And if our Gods are wrath, what wonder, when
Their traitor priests creep whispering coward fears;
Unnerve the arms and rot the hearts of men,
And filch the conquest from victorious spears? —
Yes, reverend Elders, *one* such priest I found,
And cheer’d my bandogs on the meaner hound!”

XCI.

“Be dumb, blasphemer,” cried the Pontiff seer,
“Depart, or dread’ the vengeance of the shrine;
Depart, or armies from these floors shall hear
How chiefs can mock what nations deem divine;
Then, let her Christian faith thy daughter boast,
And brave the answer of the Teuton host!”

* Gladsheim, Heaven; Walhalla, (“the Hall of the Chosen,”) did not exclude brave foes who fell in battle. See note (1).

XCII.

A paler hue shot o'er the hardy face

Of the great Earl, as thus the Elder spoke;

But calm he answered, "Summon Odin's race;

On me and mine the Teuton's wrath invoke!

Let shuddering fathers learn what priests can dream,

And warriors judge if *I* their Gods blaspheme!

XCIII.

"But peace, and hearken. — To the king I speak: —

With mine own lithsmen, and such willing aid

As Harold's tromps arouse, — yon walls I seek;

Be Cymri's throne the ransom of the maid.

On Carduel's wall, if Saxon standards wave,

Let Odin's arms the needless victim save!

XCIV.

"Grant me till noon to prove what men are worth,

Who serve the War God by the warlike Deed;

Refuse me this, King Crida, and henceforth

Let chiefs more prized the Mercian armies lead;

For I, blunt Harold, join no cause with those

Who, wolves for victims, are as hares to foes!"

XCV.

Scornful he ceased, and leaned upon his sword;

Whispering the Priests, and silent Crida, stood.

A living Thor to that barbarian horde

Was the bold Thane, — and ev'n the men of blood

Felt Harold's loss amid the host's dismay

Would rend the clasp that link'd the wild array.

XCVI.

At length out spoke the priestly chief, "The gods

Endure the boasts, to bow the pride, of men;

The Well of Wisdom sinks in Hell's abode;

The Læca shines beside the bautasten,*

And Truth too oft illumines the eyes that scorned

In the death-flash from which in vain it warned.

XCVII.

"Be the delay the pride of man demands

Vouchsafed, the nothingness of man to show!

The gods unsoftened, march thy futile bands:

Till noon we spare the victim; — seek the foe!

But when with equal shadows rests the sun —

The altar reddens, or the walls are won!"

* The Scin Læca, or shining corpse, that was seen before the bautasten, or burial-stone of a dead hero, was supposed to possess prophetic powers, and to guard the treasures of the grave.

XCVIII.

“So be it,” the Thane replied, and sternly smil’d;
Then towards the sister-twain, with pitying brow,
Whispering he came, — “Fair friend of Harold’s child,
Let our own gods at least be with thee now;
Pray that the Asas bless the Teuton strife,
And guide the swords that strike for thy sweet life.”

XCIX.

“Alas!” cried Genevieve, “Christ came to save,
Not slay: He taught the weakest how to die;
For me, for *me*, a nation glut the grave!
That nation Christ’s, and — No, the victim *I*!
Not now for *life*, my father, see me kneel,
But one kind look, — and then, how blunt the steel!”

C.

And Crida moved not! Moist were Harold’s eyes;
Bending, he whisper’d in Genevra’s ear,
“Thy presence is her safety! Time denies
All words but these; — hope in the brave; revere
The gods they serve; — by acts our faith we test;
The holiest gods are where the men are best.”

CI.

With this he turned, "Ye priests," he called aloud,

"On every head within these walls, I set
Dread weregeld for the compact; blood for blood!"

Then o'er his brows he closed his bassinet,
Shook the black death-pomp of his shadowy plume,
And his arm'd stride was lost amidst the gloom. —

CII.

And still poor Genevieve with mournful eyes

Gazed on the father, whose averted brows
Had more of darkness for her soul than lies

Under the lids of death. The murmurous
And lurid air buzz'd with a ghostlike sound
From patient murder's iron lip; — and round

CIII.

The delicate form which, like a Psyche, seemed
Beauty sublimed into the type of soul,

Fresh from such stars as ne'er on Paphos beamed,

When first on love the chastening vision stole, —
The sister virgin coil'd her clasp of woe;
Ev'n as that Sorrow which the Soul must know

CIV.

Till Soul and Love meet never more to part.

At last, from under his wide mantle's fold,
The strain'd arms lock'd on his loud-beating heart,
(As if the anguish which the king controll'd,
The man could stifle,) — Crida toss'd on high; —
And nature conquer'd in the father's cry!

CV.

Over the kneeling form swept his grey hair;

On the soft upturned eyes prest his wild kiss;
And then recoiling with a livid stare,

He faced the priests, and muttered, "Dotage this!
Crida is old, — come — come," and from the ring
Beckoned their chief, and went forth tottering.

CVI.

Out of the fane, up where the stair of pine

Wound to the summit of the camp's rough tower,
King Crida passed. On moving armour shine

The healthful beams of the fresh morning hour;
He hears the barb's shrill neigh, — the clarion's swell,
And half his armies march to Carduel.

CVII.

Far in the van, like Odin's fatal bird
Wing'd for its feast, sails Harold's raven plume.
Now from the city's heart a shout is heard,
Wall, bastion, tower, their steel-clad life resume;
Far shout! faint forms! yet seem they loud and clear
To that strain'd eyeball and that feverish ear.

CVIII.

But not on hosts that march by Harold's side,
Gazed the stern priest, who stood with Crida there;
On sullen gloomy groupes — discattered wide,
Grudging the conflict they refused to share,
Or seated round rude tents and piled spears;
Circling the mutter of rebellious fears;

CIX.

Or, near the temple fort, with folded arms
On their broad breasts, waiting the deed of blood;
On these he gazed — to gloat on the alarms
That made *him* monarch of that multitude!
Not one man there had pity in his eye.
And the priest smil'd, — then turned to watch the sky.

CX.

And the sky deepen'd, and the time rush'd on.

And Crida sees the ladders on the wall;

And dust-clouds gather round his gonfanon;

And thro' the dust-clouds glittering rise and fall

The meteor lights of helms, and shields, and glaives;

Up o'er the rampires mount the labouring waves;

CXI.

And joyous rings the Saxon's battle shout;

And Cymri's angel cry wails like despair;

And from the Dragon Keep a light shines out,

Calm as a single star in tortured air,

To whose high peace, aloof from storms, in vain

Looks a lost navy from the violent main.

CXII.

Now on the nearest wall the Pale Horse stands;

Now from the wall the Pale Horse lightens down;

And flash and vanish, file on file, the bands

Into the rent heart of the howling town;

And the Priest paling frown'd upon the sun, —

Though the sky deepened and the time rush'd on.

CXIII.

When from the camp around the fane, there rose
Ineffable cries of wonder, wrath, and fear,
With some strange light that scares the sunshine, glows
O'er Sabra's waves the crimson'd atmosphere,
And dun from out the widening, widening glare,
Like Hela's serpents, smoke-reeks wind thro' air.

CXIV.

Forth look'd the king, appall'd! and where his masts
Soared from the verge of the far forest-land,
He hears the crackling, as when vernal blasts
Shiver Groninga's pines — "Lo, the same hand,"
Cried the fierce priest, "which sway'd the soothsayer's rod,
Writes now the last runes of thine angry god!"

CXV.

And here and there, and wirbelling to and fro,
Confused, distraught, pale thousands spread the plain;
Some snatch their arms in haste, and yelling go
Where the fleets burn; some creep around the fane
Like herds for shelter; prone on earth lie some
Shrieking, "The Twilight* of the Gods hath come!"

* The Twilight of the Gods (Ragnorök), viz., the Last Day, when the world shall be destroyed in fire.

CXVI.

And the great glare hath reddened o'er the town,
And seems the strife it gildeth to appall;
Flock back dim straggling Saxons, gazing down
The lurid vallies from the jagged wall,
Still as on Cuthite towers Chaldean seers,
When some red portent flamed into the spheres.

CXVII.

And now from brake and copse — from combe and dell,
Gleams break; — steel flashes; — helms on helms arise;
Faint heard at first, — now near, now thunderous, — swell
The Cymrian mingled with the Baltic cries;
And, loud alike in each, — exulting came
War's noblest music — a Deliverer's name.

CXVIII.

“Arthur! — for Arthur! — Arthur is at hand!
Woe, Saxons, woe!” Then from the rampart height
Vanish'd each watcher; while the rescue-band
Sweep the clear slopes; and not a foe in sight!
And now the beacon on the Dragon keep
Springs from pale lustre into hues blood-deep.

CXIX.

And on that tower stood forth a lonely man;
Full on his form the beacon glory fell;
And joy revived each sinking Cymrian;
There, the still Prophet watched o'er Carduel!
Back o'er the walls, and back thro' gate and breach,
Now ebbs the war, like billows from the beach.

CXX.

Along the battlements swift crests arise,
Swift followed by avenging, smiting brands,
And fear and flight are in the Saxon cries!
The portals vomit bands on hurtling bands;
And lo, wide streaming o'er the helms, — again
The Pale Horse flings on angry winds its mane!

CXXI.

And facing still the foe, but backward borne
By his own men, towers high one kingliest chief;
Deep thro' the distance rolls his shout of scorn,
And the grand anguish of a hero's grief.
Bounded the Priest! — "The Gods are heard at last! —
Proud Harold flyeth; — and the noon is past!

CXXII.

"Come, Crida, come!" Up as from heavy sleep

The grey-hair'd giant raised his awful head;
As, after calmest waters, the swift leap

Of the strong torrent rushes to its bed, —
So the new passion seized and changed the form,
As if the rest had braced it for the storm.

CXXIII.

No grief was in the iron of that brow;

Age cramp'd no sinew in that mighty arm;
"Go," he said, sternly, "where it fits thee, thou:

Thy post with Odin — mine with Managarm! *
Let priests avert the dangers kings must dare;
My shrine yon Standard, and my Children — *there!*"

CXXIV.

So from the height he swept — as doth a cloud

That brings a tempest when it sinks below;
Swift strides a chief amidst the jarring crowd;

Swift in stern ranks the rent disorders grow;
Swift, as in sails becalm'd swells forth the wind,
The wide mass quickens with the one strong mind.

* Managarm, the Monster Wolf (symbolically, WAR). "He will be filled with the blood of men who draw near their end," &c. (PROSE EDDA.)

CXXV.

Meanwhile the victim to the Demon vow'd,
Knelt; every thought wing'd for the Angel goal,
And ev'n the terror which the form had bow'd
Search'd but new sweetness where it shook the soul.
Self was forgot, and to the Eternal Ear
Prayer but for others spoke the human fear.

CXXVI.

And when at moments from that rapt communion
With the Invisible Holy, those young arms
Clasp'd round her neck, to childhood's happy union
In the old days recalled her; such sweet charms
Did Comfort weave, that in the sister's breast
Grief like an infant sobb'd itself to rest.

CXXVII.

Up leapt the solemn priests from dull repose:
The fires were fann'd as with a sudden wind;
While shrieking loud, "Hark, hark, the conquering foes!
Haste, haste, the victim to the altar bind!"
Rush'd to the shrine the haggard Slaughter-Chief. —
As the strong gusts that whirl the fallen leaf

CXXVIII.

I' the month when wolves descend, the barbarous hands
Plunge on the prey of their delirious wrath,
Wrench'd from Genevra's clasp; — Lo, where she stands,
On earth no anchor, — is she less like Faith?
The same smile firmly sad, the same calm eye,
The same meek strength; — strength to forgive and die!

CXXIX.

“Hear us, O Odin, in this last despair!
Hear us, and save!” the Pontiff call'd aloud;
“By the Child's blood we shed, thy children spare!”
And the knife glitter'd o'er the breast that bow'd.
Dropp'd blade; — fell priest! — blood chokes a gurgling
groan;
Blood, — blood *not Christian*, dyes the altar stone!

CXXX.

Deep in the DOOMER's breast it sank — the dart;
As if from Fate it came invisibly;
Where is the hand? — from what dark hush shall start
Foeman or fiend? — no shape appalls the eye,
No sound the ear; — ice-lock'd each coward breath;
The Power the Deathsmen call'd, hath heard them — Death!

CXXXI.

While yet the stupor stuns the circle there,
Fierce shrieks — loud feet — come rushing thro' the doors;
Women with outstretch'd arms and tossing hair,
And flying warriors, shake the solemn floors;
Thick as the birds storm-driven on the decks
Of some lone ship — the last an ocean wrecks.

CXXXII.

And where on tumult, tumult whirl'd and roar'd,
Shrill'd cries, "The fires around us and behind,
And the last Fire-God, and the Flaming Sword!" *
And from without, like that destroying wind
In which the world shall perish, grides and sweeps
VICTORY — swift-cleaving thro' the battle deeps! —

CXXXIII.

VICTORY, by shouts of terrible rapture known,
Thro' crashing ranks it drives in iron rain;
Borne on the wings of fire it blazes on;
It halts its storm before the fortress fane;
And thro' the doors, and thro' the chinks of pine,
Flames its red breath upon the paling shrine.

* "And the last Fire-God and the Flaming Sword," *i. e.*, Surtur the genius, who dwells in the region of fire (Muspelheim), whose flaming sword shall vanquish the gods themselves in the last day. (PROSE EDDA.)

CXXXIV.

Roused to their demon courage by the dread
Of the wild hour, the priests a voice have found;
To pious horror show their sacred dead,
Invoke the vengeance, and explore the ground;
When, like the fiend in monkish legends known,
Sprang a grim image on the altar stone!

CXXXV.

The wolf's hide bristled on the shaggy breast,
Over the brows, the forest buffalo
With horn impending arm'd the grisly crest,
From which the swart eye sent its savage glow,
Long shall the Saxon dreams that shape recall,
And ghastly legends teem with tales of FAUL!*

CXXXVI.

Needs here to tell, that when, at Merlin's hest,
Faul led to Harold's tent the Saxon maid,
The wrathful Thane had chased the skulking priest
From the paled ranks, that evil Bode** dismay'd: —
And the grim tidings of the rite to come
Flew lip to lip thro' that awed Heathendom.

* Faul is indeed the name of one of the malignant Powers peculiarly dreaded by the Saxons, — a name that I cannot discover to have been known to the other branches of the Great Teuton Family.

** Bode, Saxon word for messenger.

CXXXVII.

Foretaught by Merlin of her mission there,
Scarce to her father's heart Genevra sprung
Than (while most soften'd) her impassioned prayer
Pierced to its human deeps; and, roused and stung
By that keen pity, keenest in the brave, —
Strength felt why strength is given, and rush'd to save.

CXXXVIII.

Amidst those quick emotions, half forgot,
Followed the tutored furtive Aleman;
On, when the portals crash'd, still heeded not,
Stole his light step behind the striding Thane.
From coign to shaft the practised glider crept,
A shadow, lost where shadows darkest slept.

CXXXIX.

And safe and screened the idol god behind,
He who once lurked to slay, kept watch to save: —
Now *there* he stood! And the same altar shrined
The wild man, the wild god! and up the nave
Flight flowed on flight; and near and loud, the name
Of 'ARTHUR' borne as on a whirlwind came.

CXL.

Down from the altar to the victim's side,
While yet shrunk back the priests — the savage leapt,
And with quick steel gash'd the strong cords that tied;
When round them both the rallying vengeance swept;
Raised every arm; — O joy! — the enchanted glaive
Shines o'er the threshold! is there time to save?

CXLI.

Whirls thro' the air a torch, — it flies — it falls
Into the centre of the murderous throng!
Dread herald of dread steps! the conscious halls
Quake where the falchion flames and fleets along;
Tho' crowd on crowd behold the falchion cleave! —
The Silver Shield rests over Genevieve!

CXLII.

Bright as the shape that smote the Assyrian,
The fulgent splendour from the arms divine
Pal'd the hell fires round God's elected Man,
And burst like Truth upon the demon-shrine.
Among the thousands stood the Conquering One,
Still, lone, and unresisted as a sun!

CXLIII.

Now thro' the doors, commingling side by side,
Saxon and Cymrian struggle hand in hand;
For there the war, in its fast ebbing tide,
Flings its last prey — there, Crida takes his stand;
There his co-monarchs hail a funeral pyre
That opes Walhalla from the grave of fire.

CXLIV.

And as a tiger swept adown a flood
With meaner beasts, that dyes the howling water
Which whirls it onward, with a waste of blood;
And gripes a stay with fangs that leave the slaughter, —
So where halts Crida, groans and falls a foe —
And deep in gore his steps receding go.

CXLV.

And his large sword has made in reeking air
Broad space (thro' which, around the golden ring
That crownlike clasps the sweep of his grey hair),
Shine the tall helms of many a Teuton king.
Lord of the West — broad-breasted Chevaline;
And Ymrick's son of Hengist's giant line;

CXLVI.

Fierce Sibert, throned by Britain's kingliest river,
And Elrid, honoured in Northumbrian homes;
And many a sire whose stubborn soul for ever
Shadows the fields where England's thunder comes.
High o'er them all his front grey Crida rears,
As some old oak whose crest a forest clears.

CXLVII.

High o'er them all, that front fierce Arthur sees,
And knows the arch invader of the land.
Swift thro' the chiefs — swift path his falchion frees;
Corpse falls on corpse before the avenger's hand;
For fair-hair'd, Ælla, Cantia's maids shall wail,
Hurl'd o'er the dead, rings Elrid's crashing mail;

CXLVIII.

His follower's arms stunn'd Sibert's might receive,
And from the sure death snatch their bleeding lord;
And now behold, O fearful Genevieve,
O'er thy doom'd father shines the charmed sword!
And shaking, as it shone, the glorious blade,
The hand for very wrath the death delay'd.

CXLIX.

“At last, at last we meet, on Cymri’s soil;
And foot to foot! Destroyer of my shrines,
And murderer of my people! Ay, recoil
Before the doom thy quailing soul divines!
Ay — turn thine eyes, — nor hosts nor flight can save!
Thy foe is Arthur — and these halls thy grave!”

CL.

“Flight,” laughed the king, whose glance had wandered round,
Where thro’ the throng had pierced a woman’s cry,
“Flight for a chief, by Saxon warriors crown’d,
And from a Walloon! — this is my reply!”
And, both hands heaving up the sword enorme,
Swept the swift orbit round the luminous form;

CLI.

Full on the gem the iron drives its course,
And shattering clinks in splinters on the floor;
The foot unsteadied by the blow’s spent force,
Slides on the smoothness of the soil of gore;
Gore, quench the blood-thirst! guard, O soil, the guest!
For Freedom’s heel is on the Invader’s breast!

CLII.

When, swift beneath the flashing of the blade,
When, swift before the bosom of the foe,
She sprang, she came, she knelt, — the guardian maid!
And, startling vengeance from the righteous blow,
Cried, "Spare, Oh spare, this sacred life to me,
A father's life! — I would have died for thee!"

CLIII.

While thus within, the Christian God prevails,
Without the idol temple, fast and far,
Like rolling storm-wrecks, shattered by the gales,
Fly the dark fragments of the Heathen War,
Where, thro' the fires that flash from camp to wave,
Escape the land that locks them in its grave?

CLIV.

When by the Hecla of their burning fleet
Dismay'd amidst the marts of Carduel,
The Saxons rush'd without the walls to meet
The Viking's swords, which their mad terrors swell
Into a host — assaulted, rear and van,
Scarce smote the foe before the flight began.

CLV.

In vain were Harold's voice, and name, and deeds,
Unnerved by omen, priest, and shapeless fear,
And less by man than their own barbarous creeds
Appall'd, — a God in every shout they hear,
And in their blazing barks behold unfurl'd,
The wings of Muspell* to consume the world.

CLVI.

Yet still awhile the heart of the great Thane,
And the stout few that gird the gonfanon,
Build a steel bulwark on the midmost plain,
That stems all Cymri, — so Despair fights on.
When from the camp the new volcanoes spring,
With sword and fire he comes, — the Dragon King!

CLVII.

Then all, save Harold, shriek to Hope farewell;
Melts the last barrier; through the clearing space,
On towards the camp the Cymrian chiefs compel
The ardent followers from the tempting chace;
Thro' Crida's ranks to Arthur's side they gain,
And blend two streams in one resistless main.

* Muspell, Fire; Muspelheim, the region of Fire, the final destroyer.
King Arthur. II.

CLVIII.

True to his charge as chief, mid all disdain
Of recreant lithsmen — Harold's iron soul
Sees the storm sweep beyond it o'er the plain;
And lofty duties, yet on earth, controul
The yearnings for Walhalla: — Where the day
Paled to the burning ships — he towered away.

CLXIX.

And with him, mournful, drooping, rent and torn,
But captive not — the Pale Horse dragg'd its mane.
Beside the fire-reflecting waves, forlorn,
As ghosts that gaze on Phlegethon — the Thane
Saw listless leaning o'er the silent coasts,
The spectre wrecks of what at morn were hosts.

CLX.

Tears rush'd to burning eyes, and choked awhile
The trumpet music of his manly voice,
At length he spoke: "And are ye then so vile!
A death of straw! Is that the Teuton's choice?
By all our gods, I hail that reddening sky,
And bless the burning fleets which flight deny!

CLXI.

“Lo, yet the thunder clothes the charger’s mane,
As when it crested Hengist’s helmet crown!
What ye have lost — an hour can yet regain;
Life has no path so short as to renown!
Shrunk if your ranks, — when first from Albion’s shore
Your sires carved kingdoms, were their numbers more?

CLXII.

“If not your valour, let your terrors speak.
Where fly? — what path can lead ye from the foes?
Where hide? — what cavern will not vengeance seek?
What shun ye? Death? — Death smites ye in repose!
Back to your king; from Hela snatch the brave —
We best escape, when most we scorn, the grave.”

CLXIII.

Roused by the words, tho’ half reluctant still,
The listless ranks re-form their slow array,
Sullen but stern they labour up the hill,
And gain the brow! — In smouldering embers lay
The castled camp, and slanting sunbeams shed
Light o’er the victors — quiet o’er the dead.

CLXIV.

Hush'd was the roar of war — the conquered ground
Waved with the glitter of the Cymrian spears;
The temple fort the Dragon standard crown'd;
And Christian anthems peal'd on Pagan ears;
The Mercian halts his bands — their front surveys;
No fierce eye kindles to his fiery gaze.

CLXV.

One dull, disheartened, but not dastard gloom
Clouds every brow, — like men compelled to die,
Who see no hope that can elude the doom,
Prepared to fall but powerless to defy.
Not those the ranks, yon ardent hosts to face!
The Hour had conquered earth's all conquering race.

CLXVI.

The leader paused, and into artful show,
Doubling the numbers with extended wing,
“Here halt,” he said, “to yonder hosts I go
With terms of peace or war to Cymri's king.”
He turned, and towards the Victor's bright array,
With tromp and herald, strode his bitter way.

CLXVII.

Before the signs to war's sublime belief
Sacred, the host disparts its hushing wave.
Moved by the sight of that renownèd chief,
Joy stills the shout that might insult the brave;
And princeliest guides the stately foeman bring,
Where Odin's temple shrines the Christian king.

CLXVIII.

The North's fierce idol, roll'd in pools of blood,
Lies crush'd before the Cross of Nazareth.
Crouch'd on the splintered fragments of their god,
Silent as clouds from which the tempest's breath
Has gone, — the butchers of the priesthood rest. —
Each heavy brow bent o'er each stoney breast.

CLXIX.

Apart, the guards of Cymri stand around
The haught repose of captive Teuton kings;
With eyes disdainful of the chains that bound,
And fronts superb — as if defeat but flings
A kinglier grandeur over fallen power: —
So suns shine larger in their setting hour.

CLXX.

From these remote, unchained, unguarded, leant
On the gnarl'd pillar of the fort of pine,
The Saturn of the Titan armament,
His looks averted from the altered shrine
Whence iron Doom the Antique Faith has hurl'd,
For that new Jove who dawns upon the world!

CLXXI.

And one broad hand conceal'd the monarch's face;
And one lay calm on the low-bended head
Of the forgiving child, whose young embrace
Clasp'd that grey wreck of Empire! All had fled
The heart of pride: — Thrones, hosts, the gods! yea all
That scaled the heaven, strew'd Hades with their fall!

CLXXII.

But Natural Love, the household melody
Steals thro' the dearth, — resettling on the breast;
The bird returning with the silenc'd sky,
Sings in the ruin, and rebuilds its nest.
Home came the Soother that the storm exil'd, —
And Crida's hand lay calm upon his child!

CLXXIII.

Beside her sister saint, Genevra kneeleth,
Mourning her father's in her Country's woes;
And near her, hushing iron footsteps, stealeth
The noblest knight the wondrous Table knows —
Whispering low comfort into thrilling ears —
When Harold's plume floats up the flash of spears.

CLXXIV.

But the proud Earl, with warning hand and eye,
Repells the yearning arms, the eager start;
Man amidst men, his haughty thoughts deny
To foes the triumph o'er his father's heart;
Quickly he turn'd — where shone amidst his ring
Of subject planets, the Hyperion King.

CLXXV.

There Tristan graceful — Agrafayn uncouth;
And Owaine comely with the battle-scar,
And Geraint's lofty age, to venturous youth
Glory and guide, as to proud ships a star;
And Gawaine, sobered to his gravest smile,
Lean on the spears that lighten through the pile.

CLXXVI.

There stood the stoic Alemen sedate,
Blocks hewn from man, which love with life inspired;
There, by the Cross, from eyes serene with Fate,
Look'd into space the Mage! and carnage-tired,
On Ægis shields, like Jove's still'd thunders, lay
Thine ocean giants, Scandinavia!

CLXXVII.

But lo, the front, where conquest's auriole
Shone, as round Genius marching at the van
Of nations; — where the victories of the soul
Stamped Nature's masterpiece, perfected Man:
Fair as young Honour's vision of a king
Fit for bold hearts to serve, free lips to sing!

CLXXVIII.

So stood the Christian Prince in Odin's hall,
Gathering in one, Renown's converging rays;
But, in the hour of triumph, turn, from all
War's victor pomp, the memory and the gaze;
Miss that last boon the mission should achieve,
And rest where droops the dove-like Genevieve.

CLXXIX.

Now at the sight of Mercia's haughty lord,
A loftier grandeur calms yet more his brow;
And leaning lightly on his sheathless sword,
Listening he stood, while spoke the Earl: — "I bow
Not to war's fortune, but the victor's fame;
Thine is so large, it shields thy foes from shame.

CLXXX.

"Prepared for battle, proffering peace I come,
On yonder hills eno' of Saxon steel
Remains, to match the Cymrian Christendom;
Not slaves with masters, men with men would deal.
We cannot leave your land, our chiefs in gyves, —
While chains gall Saxons, Saxon war survives.

CLXXXI.

"Our kings, our women, and our priests release,
And in their name I pledge (no mean return)
A ransom worthy of both nations — Peace;
Peace with the Teuton! On your hills shall burn
No more the beacon; on your fields, no more
The steed of Hengist plunge its hoofs in gore.

CLXXXII.

“Peace while this race remains — (our sons, alas,
We cannot bind!) Peace with the Mercian men:
This is the ransom. Take it, and we pass
Friends from a foeman’s soil; reject it, — then
Firm to this land we cling, as if our own,
Till the last Saxon falls, or Cymri’s throne!”

CLXXXIII.

Abrupt upon the audience dies the voice,
And varying passions stir the murmurous groupes;
Here, to the wiser; there, the haughtier choice:
Youth rears its crest; but age forboding droops;
Chiefs yearn for fame; the crowds to safety cling;
The murmurs hush, and thus replies the King: —

CLXXXIV.

“Foe, thy proud speech offends no manly ear.
So would I speak, could our conditions change.
Peace gives no shame, where war has brought no fear;
We fought for freedom, — we disdain revenge;
The freedom won, no cause for war remains,
And loyal Honour binds more fast than chains.

CLXXXV.

“The Peace thus proffered, with accustomed rites,
Hostage and oath, confirm, ye Teuton kings,
And ye are free! Where we, the Christians, fight,
Our Valkyrs sail with healing on their wings;
We shed no blood but for our fatherland! —
And so, frank soldier, take this soldier’s hand!”

CLXXXVI.

Low o’er that conquering hand, the high-soul’d foe
Bow’d the war plum’d upon his raven crest;
Caught from those kingly words, one generous glow
Chaced Hate’s last twilight from each Cymrian breast;
Humbled, the captives hear the fetters fall,
Power’s tranquil shadow — Mercy, awes them all!

CLXXXVII.

Dark scowl the Priests; — with vengeance Priestcraft dies!
Slow looks, where Pride yet struggles, Crida rears;
On Crida’s child rest Arthur’s soft’ning eyes;
And Crida’s child is weeping happy tears;
And Lancelot, closer at Genevra’s side,
Pales at the compact that may lose the bride.

CLXXXVIII.

When from the altar by the holy rood,
Come the deep accents of the Cymrian Mage,
Sublimely bending o'er the multitude
Thought's Atlas temples crown'd with Titan age,
O'er Druid robes the beard's broad silver streams,
As when the vision rose on virgin dreams.

CLXXXIX.

"Hearken, ye Scythia's and Cimmeria's sons,
Whose sires alike by golden rivers dwelt,
When sate the Asas on their hunter thrones;
When Orient vales rejoiced the shepherd Celt;
While EVE's young races towards each other drawn,
Roved lingering round the Eden gates of dawn.

CXC.

"Still the old brother-bond in these new homes,
After long woes, shall bind your kindred races;
Here, the same God shall find the sacred domes;
And the same land-marks bound your resting-places,
What time, o'er realms to Heus and Thor unknown,
Both Celt and Saxon rear their common throne.

CXCI.

“Meanwhile, revere the Word the viewless Hand
 Writes on the leaves of kingdom-dooming stars;
 Thro’ Prydain’s Isle of Pines, from sea to land,
 Where yet Rome’s eagle leaves the thunder scars,
 The sceptre-sword of Saxon kings shall reach,
 And new-born nations speak the Teuton’s speech.

CXCII.

“All save thy mountain empire, Dragon king!
 All save the Cymrian’s Ararat — Wild Wales! *
 Here Cymrian bards to fame and God shall sing —
 Here Cymrian freemen breathe the hardy gales,
 And the same race that Heus the Guardian led,
 Rise from these graves — when God awakes the dead!”

CXCIII.

The Prophet paused, and all that pomp of plumes
 Bowed as the harvest which the south wind heaves,
 When, while the breeze disturbs, the beam illumines,
 And blessings gladden in the trembling sheaves.
 He paused, and thus renewed: “Thrice happy, ye
 Founders of shrines and sires of kings to be!

* “Their Lord they shall praise,
 And their language they shall preserve;
 Their land they shall lose,
 Except Wild Wales!”

CXCIV.

“Hear, Harold, type of the strong Saxon soul,
Supple to truth, untameable by force,
Thy dauntless blood thro’ Gwynedd’s chiefs shall roll,*
Thro’ Scotland’s monarchs take its fiery course,
And flow with Arthur’s, in the later days,
Thro’ Ocean-Cæsars, either zone obeys.

CXCv.

“Man of the manly heart, reward the foe
Who braved thy sword, and yet forbore thy breast,
Who loved thy child, yet could the love forego
And give the sire; — thy looks supply the rest,
I read thine answer in thy generous glance!
Stand forth — bold child of Christian Chevisaunce!”

CXCvi.

Then might ye see a sight for smiles and tears,
Young Lancelot’s hand in Harold’s cordial grasp,
While from his breast the frank-eyed father rears
The cheek that glows beneath the arms that clasp;
“Shrink’st thou,” he said, “from bonds by fate reveal’d? —
Go — rock my grandson in the Cymrian’s shield!”

* This prediction refers to the marriage of the daughter of Griffith ap Llewellyn (Prince of Gwynedd, or North Wales, whose name and fate are not unfamiliar to those who have read the romance of “Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings”) with Fleance. From that marriage descended the Stuarts, and indeed the reigning family of Great Britain.

CXC VII.

“And ye,” the solemn voice resumed, “O kings!

Hearken, Pendragon, son of Odin hear!

There is a mystery in the heart of things,

Which Truth and Falsehood, seek alike with fear,

To Truth from Heaven, to Falsehood breathed from hell,

Comes yet to both the unquiet oracle.

CXC VIII.

“Not vainly, Crida, priest, and rune, and dream,

Warned thee of fates commingling into one

The silver river and the mountain stream;

From Odin’s daughter and Pendragon’s son,

Shall rise those kings that in remotest years

Shall grasp the birthright of the Saxon spears.

CXC IX.

“The bright decree that seem’d a curse to Fate,

Blesses both races when fulfill’d by love;

Saxon, from Arthur shall thy lineage date,

Thine eagles, Arthur, from thy Saxon dove^{*(2)}.

The link of peace let nuptial garlands weave,

And Cymri’s queen be Saxon Genevieve!”

* See Note 2.

CC.

Perplexed, reluctant with the pangs of pride,
And shadowy doubts from dark religion thrown,
Stern Crida lingering turned his face aside;
Then rise the elders from the idol stone;
From fallen chains the kindred Teutons spring,
Low murmurs rustle round the moody king;

CCI.

On priest and warrior, while they whisper, dwells
The searching light of that imperious eye;
Warrior and priest, the prophet word compels;
And overmasters like a destiny —
When towards the maid the radiant conqueror drew,
And said, "Enslaver, it is mine to sue!"

CCII.

To Crida, then, "Proud chief, I do confess
The loftier attribute 't is thine to boast.
The pride of kings is in the power to bless,
The kingliest hand is that which gives the most;
Priceless the gift I ask thee to bestow, —
But doubly royal is a generous foe!"

CCIII.

Then forth — subdued, yet stately, Crida came,
And the last hold in that rude heart was won:
“Hero, thy conquest makes no more my shame,
He shares thy glory who can call thee ‘Son!’
So may this love-knot bind and bless the lands!”
Faltering he spoke — and joined the plighted hands.

CCIV.

There flock the hosts as to a holy ground.
There, where the dove at last may fold the wing!
His mission ended, and his labours crown’d,
Fair as in fable stands the Dragon King —
Below the Cross, and by his prophet’s side,
With Carduel’s knighthood kneeling round his bride.

CCV.

What gallant deeds in gentle lists were done,
What lutes made joyaunce sweet in jasmine bowers,
Let others tell: — Slow sets the summer sun;
Slow fall the mists, and closing, droop the flowers;
Faint in the gloaming dies the vesper bell, —
And Dream-land sleeps round golden Carduel.

NOTES TO BOOK XII.

- 1 “*To all the valiant Gladsheim’s halls unclose ,
In Heaven the comrades were on earth the foes.*”

Page 267, stanza LXXXIX., line 5—6.

HAROLD’S disdain of the notions of the Saxon Priesthood when they oppose his own purpose or offend his native humanity, is in accordance with many anecdotes of the fierce followers of Odin, who at one time are represented as submissively respectful to soothsayer and omen, — and, at another, as haughtily scornful of both; — resembling in this the heroes of the Iliad, — where, (to say nothing of the passionate inconsistencies of Agamemnon and Achilles,) Hector himself departs from his usual piety when Polydamas (Book XII.) interprets an omen into a warning not to storm the Grecian ships, — and exclaims, in the spirit almost of modern philosophy,

“Without a sign his sword the brave man draws,
And asks no omen but his country’s cause.”

In the distinctions, however, between the manly belief of Harold and the more servile superstition of Crida, it is intended to intimate the qualities and impressions from which the Christian religion would make its earliest proselytes. We must remember, that it was not very long after the date, which the establishment of the Mercian kingdom fixes to the events of this poem, that the various kings of the Heptarchy were converted.

2 “*Saxon, from Arthur shall thy lineage date,
Thine eagles, Arthur, from thy Saxon dove.*”

Page 303, stanza cxcix., line 3—4.

According to Welch genealogists Arthur left no son; and I must therefore invite the believer in Merlin's prophecy to suppose that it was by a daughter that Arthur's line was continued, and the royalty of Britain restored to the Cymrian kings, through the House of Tudor. The reader will pardon me, by the way, if I have somewhat perplexed him, now and then, by a similarity between the names of “Genevieve” and “Genevra.” Both are used by the French Fabliasts as synonymous with Guenever; and the more shrewd will perhaps perceive that the reason why the name of Lancelot's mistress has been made almost identical with that of Arthur's, is to vindicate the fidelity of the Cymrian Queen Guenever from that scandal which the levity of the French romance writers has most improperly, and without any warrant from graver authorities, cast upon it, in connection with Lancelot. It is to be presumed that those ancient slanderers were misled by the

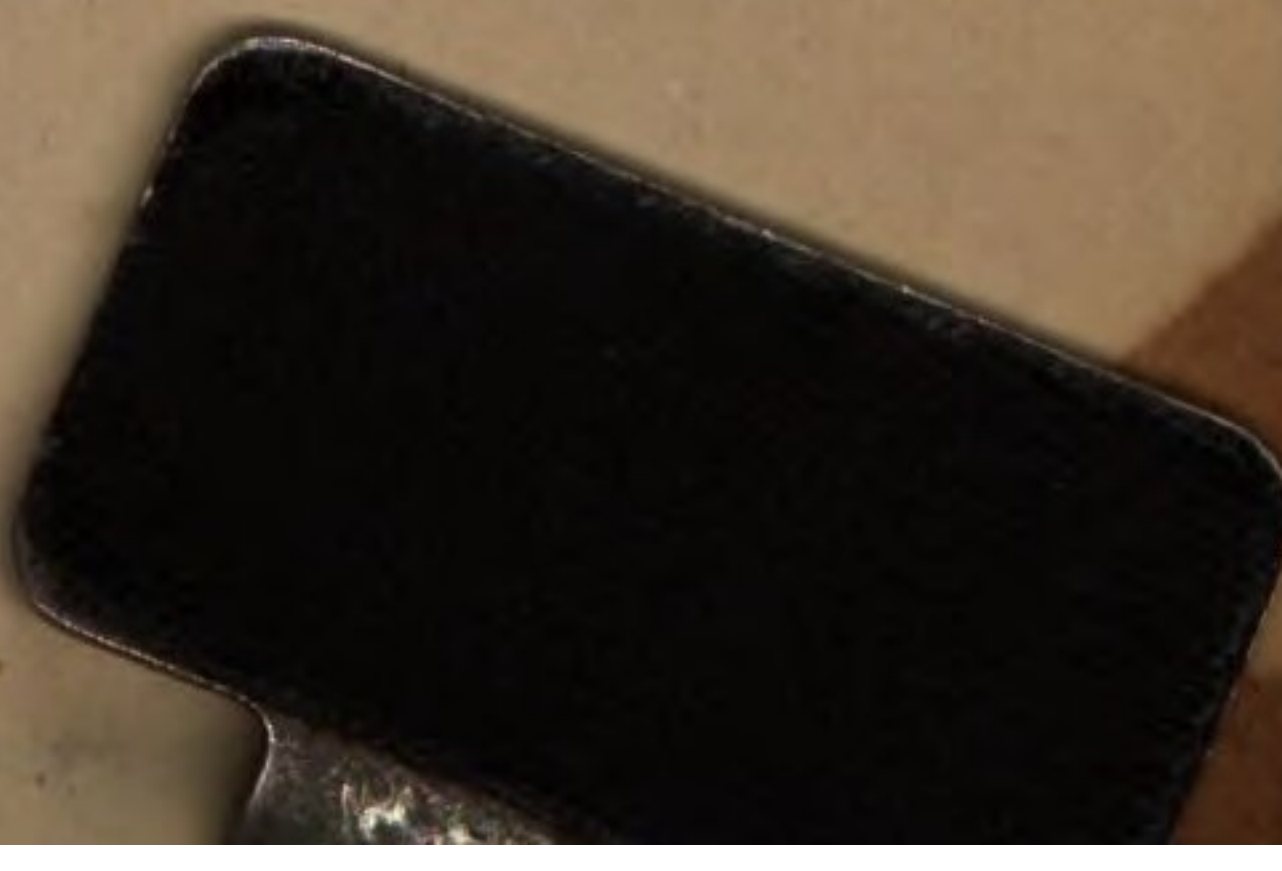
confusion of names', and that it was his own Genevra, and not Arthur's Genevieve, who received Lancelot's homage. — But indeed my Lancelot is altogether a different personage from the Lancelot whom the Fabliasts represent as Arthur's nephew.

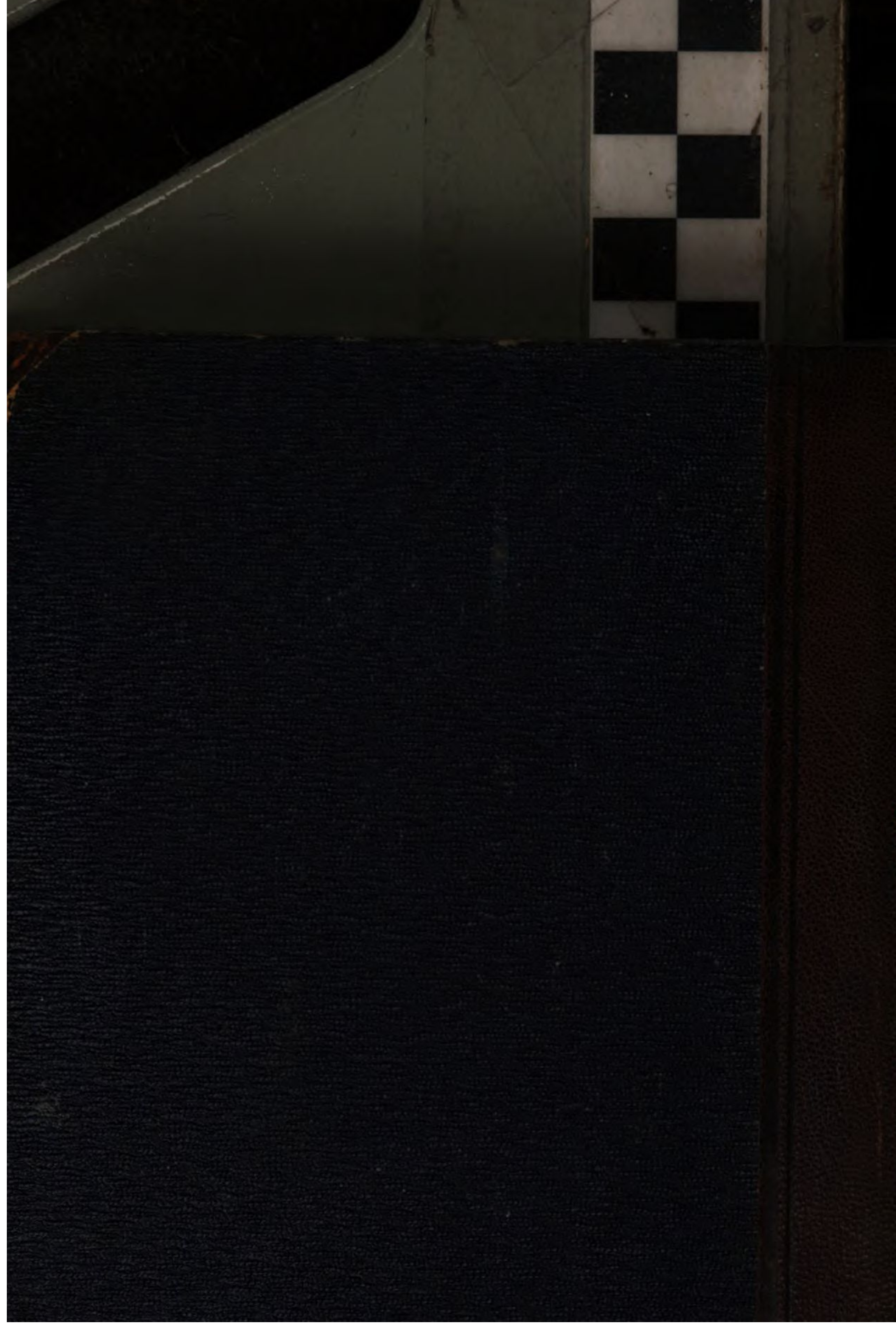
THE END.

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